

## **Chapter 9: Gordon and Eckert's Emotional Argument, Who Do Not Understand the Japanese Language**

### **Strong opposition to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' request for deletion in the past**

Surprisingly, among those who initially began to criticize Ramseyer were Andrew Gordon, a Japanese history specialist, and Carter Eckert, a specialist in East Asian languages and civilizations, who are Ramseyer's colleagues at the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University. They were followed by Jeannie Suk Gersen, who I took up earlier.

The two announced a joint statement, "Statement by Andrew Gordon, Professor, Department of History, Carter Eckert, Professor, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University," on February 17, 2021.<sup>(68)</sup>

This means that specialists in Japanese and Korean studies, from the same institute, gave the world a statement criticizing a paper written by Ramseyer, another specialist in Japanese studies. This is an extremely rare event. It reached South Korean media and raised a ruckus.

It is natural in the academic world that papers be subjected to criticism and verification but I know no other example of a statement released to the rest of the world that criticized a colleague. Why did they do this? For Gordon, this act is quite understandable from his past speech and behavior. As I explained earlier, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan once requested depictions of the comfort women in a history textbook (for American high school students) published in the US by McGraw-Hill to be deleted. At the time, Gordon issued a very strong statement of opposition.

The textbook contained the following passage:

"The Japanese Army forcibly recruited, conscripted and dragooned as many as 200,000 women aged 14 to 20 to serve in military brothels, called 'comfort houses.'"  
"The Japanese military massacred large numbers of comfort women to cover up the operation."

What is mentioned here are beliefs of “200,000 comfort women,” “comfort women forceful mobilization,” “comfort women sex slave” and “Korean comfort women massacre,” which have been shown to be false. No evidence whatsoever to support these beliefs has been presented, to this day. The official view of the Government of Japan, an ally of the U.S., is that these beliefs have no basis.

I wonder if Gordon thinks that recognition of the Ramseyer article, which denies these points of view and beliefs, jeopardizes his position as a historian. The tenor of the statement is quite emotional and the contents include many biased assumptions. However, the claims in the statement function serve as a “source” and critics thereafter have used the statement as a “source”.

### **Being deceived not assumed?**

The two criticize the Ramseyer paper from various points, and the following two points are the main ones:

- (1) No actual contracts are presented that are signed by Korean women or their families and there is no way of telling what kind of contracts was concluded.
- (2) Whether the women or their families voluntarily agreed is unknown. The recruiters probably lied or blurred their words to deceive them. Therefore, there was no voluntary agreement and so Ramseyer’s paper is thereby completely undermined.

In my view, though, their criticisms are inconsistent and erroneous. Now, let us examine what they are. Incidentally, in Gordon and Eckert’s joint statement, I do not know which of the two made a given remark, so I will refer to the both of them.

They state:

“It means that in oral communication to the women and their families, it was an easy matter to obscure the nature of the work being asked for. Indeed, one finds much oral testimony from the women that they were deceived as to the nature of their expected work. It would be all the more significant if, as we suspect, the contracts themselves used these opaque terms. Of course, we cannot be sure if they did, if neither sample nor actual contracts survive.”

Let me make an additional explanation, as this may be unclear.

Their thinking is that, if actual contracts had survived, they have shown the nature of the work and demonstrated the recruiters' deception. They assume that the contracts used terms that would have misled the women (including their families). If actual contracts are discovered to prove use of such opaque terms, then the women were deceived, rather than concluded a contract, rendering Ramseyer's paper invalid. That is, they believe that Ramseyer does not assume that the women were deceived.

### **Ignoring the evidence mentioned by an opponent**

However, as I wrote in Chapter 1, Ramseyer assumed the possibility that the women and their families were deceived and took deception of women into account. Let me quote, again:

“Korea had a problem distinct from any in Japan. It had a large corps of professional labor recruiters, and those recruiters had a history of deceptive tactics. In 1935, Korean police records counted 247 Japanese and 2,720 Korean recruiters. [Omitted] In the late 1930s, Korean newspapers reported a ring of 11 recruiters who attracted over 50 young women into prostitution.”

Ramseyer clearly stated here that “a large corps of professional labor recruiters” used deceptive tactics. Therefore, Gordon's and Eckert's assumption is wrong, in the first place.

If the women and their parents were deceived, would the legal economic model presented by Ramseyer in his paper be completely undermined? Not at all. As we have seen in Chapter 1, women, deceived or not deceived, were treated similarly if they concluded equivalent contracts (including oral ones), namely an up-front advance, term of service, price, division of earnings and share of the food and lodging expenses. These are shown by the Japanese army's comfort station rules, which are mentioned many times in U.S. Army reports, including the Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report, United States Office of War Information Psychological Warfare Team, and reports related to them.

In that report, attention should be paid, in particular, to the fact that Korean comfort women signed the contracts for themselves while they say that they were induced by the agents' coaxing. In other words, they were aware that the recruiters were cajoling them. The women could more or less tell what the nature of the work was because of the sizable amount of the up-front advance.

Nevertheless, Gordon and Eckert refused to recognize the contents of those documents, read but ignored the literature mentioned in the References section of the paper and obstinately said that Ramseyer's paper should be retracted if he cannot present contracts signed by Korean women or by their families. It is not that the Ramseyer paper did not present evidence but they ignored it. In addition, they do not say why they have ignored the evidence.

### **Failing to understand the meaning of the word *shakufu***

This is exactly what I said earlier about the position common to scholars who criticized Ramseyer. That is, they make no mention of the sources or evidence listed in the References section, in particular. Gordon and Eckert appear to have ignored the evidence because the evidence counters their criticism.

In relation to this, there are some words that make me wonder if they are at all proficiency in Japanese and if they have properly read the sources in the list of references. They write:

“One of his sources (Naimusho 1938) provides sample contracts for Japanese women recruited to comfort stations in Shanghai. It describes the women as *shakufu* (barmaid) not *ianfu* (comfort woman). It is written in Japanese.”

The logic the two develop here is that Ramseyer says the document shows *ianfu* contracts but actually mentions a document related to a *shakufu* (barmaid) and so this is underhanded and “research misconduct”.

However, Gordon's and Eckert's fault, in the first place, is that they think *ianfu* and *shakufu* are totally different. They do not really understand the meaning of *shakufu*. The Shanghai consular police station report mentioned in the References indicates, as shown

below, that *shakufu* is a general term that refers to either a licensed prostitute, unlicensed prostitute or comfort woman, depending on the context.

### **Lack of basic knowledge**

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Situations in 1938 of Japanese Special Women Residing in the Area, Control of Them and the Concession Authorities' Regulation of Unlicensed Prostitution (sourced by the history of the Consular Police, Japanese General-Consulate in Shanghai)

1. *Geigi* [omitted]

2. *Shakufu*

Rental rooms operated by local Japanese residents were established as businesses in July 1907 employing grade B *geigi* (*shogi*) according to the state-regulated prostitution of the mainland. In June 1929, the Shanghai Department of Public Security announced the abolition of Chinese prostitutes in the entire area under its control and took attitudes such as demanding Japanese operators to close their businesses in Chinese quarters [omitted] and, in the same year, we [author's note: the Consulate-General of Japan in Shanghai] established, as a regulation to replace the abolished prostitutes, a restaurant *shakufu* system and have sought improvement of the employed *shakufu* ever since. At the outbreak of the Shanghai incident, the number of stationed personnel of our armed forces was increased and, as an aid to recreation institutions for these soldiers, navy comfort stations (practically rental rooms) were set up [omitted].<sup>(69)</sup>

The title of this document mentions “Regulation of Unlicensed Prostitution,” which means that the term *shakufu* is a euphemism for prostitutes (“unlicensed prostitutes” may have later become “comfort women”). Ramseyer also reads this as “unlicensed prostitutes” in this context. As with “comfort women,” this is a technical term often used by the Japanese army and authorities in official documents.

Gordon and Eckert apparently claimed that women were made into comfort women due to misrepresentation by using the term *shakufu* but, in the common use of the word in those days, *shakufu* might refer to comfort women, depending on the context. It certainly is “opaque” but this should not mean that those women were “deceived as to the nature of their expected work.”

Gordon and Eckert meant to denounce Ramseyer in conducting research misconduct. On the contrary, Gordon and Eckert should be chided for their lack of fundamental knowledge.

### **Unreasonable as reasons for denouncing the article**

Even Jeannie Suk Gersen, of Harvard Law School, and received various instructions from Gordon and Eckert, wrote in *The New Yorker*, as I mentioned in the previous chapter:

“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.”

*Shakufu* was “understood” as a euphemism for a sex worker. Gordon and Eckert go on to pour their stock of knowledge into the word *ian*. And this is intended to claim that the word *ian* was not necessarily interpreted as “prostitution” by Japanese or Koreans in those days.

As evidence, they show that the term *ian* was used with the meaning of “amusement” or “recreation” as used in *The Asahi Shimbun* newspaper. Naturally, this is nothing new or surprising to Japanese people.

It is normal for one word to have many different meanings. It would have been a problem if there had been cases in which the term *ianfu* was mistaken for “waitress,” “hotel worker” or “amusement park worker.”

However, as shown by Ramseyer’s paper, a hefty up-front advance was a prerequisite of the contract with the women (families). It is reasonable to assume that, at that point, the families or women realized that the work offered was *shakufu* or *shogi* (meaning a licensed or unlicensed prostitute or comfort woman).

Today, there may be ads for applications for a job of “serving customers.” If the hourly wage offered is 1,000 yen, it would be normal to guess that the job is a coffee shop worker or something like that. However, the ad said, “Help wanted to serve customers,

at 5,000 yen/hr. minimum,” it should be clear that the workplace will not be an ordinary coffee shop or restaurant. If Gordon and Eckert insist that it is natural to be confused by this, then they are insulting the intelligence of the people of those days.

Given this perspective, criticism like this relating to the interpretation of words used in those days is not sufficient as reasons for denouncing Ramseyer’s paper.

Having said that, the experts’ lengthy explanations function to give the impression that Ramseyer’s understanding of the Japanese language is poor. Their stock of knowledge about the word *ian* is another clear example of the knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of those who criticize Ramseyer’s paper.

### **Based on misunderstanding or misreading**

Anyway, what puzzles me is that they claim to have read the Home Ministry document, cited below, which is mentioned in the References in Ramseyer’s paper, “Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War.”

The document lists points given at that time by the Ministry of Home Affairs of Japan in the treatment of women who intended to emigrate from Japan to China to work as prostitutes. The document shows that strict control was exercised to prevent human trafficking and kidnapping while recognizing the necessity for such women. That is, it clearly shows that the Japanese government did not forcefully “take away” women to make them work or treated them like slaves.

However, critics assert that “forceful taking away” and “sex slaves” are the correct interpretation and condemn Ramseyer’s paper for being wrong. Careful reading of this document is enough to see that the critics’ claims are based on misunderstanding or misreading.

As a result, I cannot help doubting their ability to read and comprehend Japanese (due to its length, readers can read the second half first, or skip this part to go to my explanation in the next subsection).

Home Ministry document

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“Matters Concerning the Control and Regulation on Recruitment of Women Travelling to China” February 23, 1938, Home Ministry Police Affairs Bureau to prefectural governors

Along with the recent restoration of order in various parts of China, emigrants are significantly increasing and among them are a large number of women having connection with local restaurants, “cafés” or rental rooms (author’s note: refer to brothels) who aim to engage in these types of business. In addition, those who recruit such women in the mainland Japan, claiming that their recruitment activities were based upon the consent of the military authorities, are recently beginning to appear everywhere. While women’s emigration is necessary and imperative in some cases in view of the actual local situations and the necessity is recognized for the police authorities to give special consideration and take measures in line with the circumstances, failure to properly crack down on recruitment and agency of these women would not only tarnish the prestige of the Empire and bring disgrace on the Imperial Army but also exert an undesirable influence on people on the home front, especially (surviving) families of soldiers at the front, and make it difficult to ensure non-deviation from the spirit of the international convention on the traffic of women. Therefore, concerning these matters, in view of the actual local situations and other circumstances, the following items shall be followed henceforth, which is hereby notified.

1. Traveling of women for the purpose of prostitution shall be condoned for the time being only in the case of women who are 21 years of age or older, practically engaged in prostitution in the mainland at present, free of venereal or other infectious diseases and heading to North or Middle China, to whom identification documents shall be issued based on Classified Third Division of American Affairs Bureau Document No. 3776 Notice from the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs dated August 1937.
2. When identification documents mentioned in the foregoing item are issued, the women shall be instructed in advance to promptly return home when the term of the provisional contract of business has expired or the need for it has been eliminated.
3. Women who intend to travel for the purpose of prostitution must appear at the police station in person to apply for the issuance of identification documents.

4. When applications are made for the issuance of identification documents for women to travel for the purpose of prostitution, they shall be made to obtain approval from their closest lineal ascendant in the same family register, or from head of the family if no lineal ascendant exists or, if no one exists to give approval, the fact shall be made clear.

5. When identification documents are issued for women to travel for the purpose of prostitution, the contract of business and other various items shall be examined to pay special attention to confirm that they have not been trafficked and kidnapped.

6. For recruitment of women who travel for the purpose of prostitution or engaging in other business relating to general entertainment with a sexual connotation, all those who claim to have consent of or connection with the military or have any other form of influence on the military shall be strictly controlled.

7. For recruitment of women who travel for the aforementioned purpose, all those who advertise or falsify or exaggerate facts shall be strictly controlled. People engaged in recruitment shall be closely examined and those of doubtful identity without an official permit or a certificate issued by a diplomatic establishment shall not be permitted to conduct those activities.

End of document<sup>(70)</sup>

### **Systematic verification of the existence of a contract**

Especially important in this document are items 5 and 7. Let's take another look at them:

5. When identification documents are issued for women to travel for the purpose of prostitution, the contract of business and other various items shall be examined to pay special attention to confirm that they have not been trafficked and kidnapped.

7. For recruitment of women who travel for the aforementioned purpose, all those who advertise or falsify or exaggerate facts shall be strictly controlled. People engaged in recruitment shall be closely examined and those of doubtful identity

without an official permit or a certificate issued by a diplomatic establishment shall not be permitted to conduct those activities.

In short, women who travel to China with the purpose of engaging in prostitution “appear at the police in person to apply for the issuance of identification documents” subject to “approval from their closest lineal ascendant in the same family register, or from head of the family if no lineal ascendant exists.” At that time, they underwent strict checks to prevent human trafficking or kidnapping against their intent.

In addition, the document says that women shall be instructed to promptly return home when the term of the provisional contract of business has expired or expiration has been judged unnecessary (that is, there is no need to wait until the end of the contract period because the up-front advance has been paid off).

Recruiters were also prohibited to deceive women by using exaggerated advertising or falsehood and, if their identity was in doubt, they had to turn over to the police the woman they deceived and took along. There are many other notifications or circulars to that effect. This means that there were systems in place for verification of the five documents mentioned earlier (a license for prostitution, a letter of consent, a personal background report, a sealed certificate and a copy of a family register) in order to confirm if there was a contract.

### **Crimes of unscrupulous recruiters**

Even so, there is naturally the possibility that unscrupulous Korean recruiters pretended to be women’s parents, forged documents and deceived women, who could not read and were not proficient in the Japanese language to get them to emigrate. If that was the case, as Japan made much effort to prevent such activity, activities that did occur were not the responsibility of the Japanese army or Japanese administrative personnel but the criminal acts of unscrupulous recruiters. Obviously, there was no conspiracy between the Japanese army, Japanese administrative or military personnel and dishonest recruiters.

Reading a document like this makes me think that, even if there were different levels of understanding of contracts and agreements, the claims of doubt that the “women were deceived as to the nature of their expected work” is not at all reasonable. The demand

for presentation of actual contracts, which are highly unlikely to be discovered, to prove that they were not deceived is basically an act of spite. If they deny the contents of this document, why not present primary sources that deny the contents of *this* document, rather than simply ignoring them?

Because of their focus on this document, some scholars subsequently set their eyes on the expression in item 1 “shall be condoned for the time being” to use it as a basis for criticism. Certainly, the preceding part states:

“...difficult to ensure non-deviation from the spirit of the international convention on the traffic of women. Therefore, concerning these matters, in view of the actual local situations and other circumstances, the following items shall be followed henceforth, which is hereby notified.”

The phrase “shall be condoned” follows. Accordingly, critics point out that the Japanese army “condoned” women traveling with full awareness of their violation of the international convention (the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children).

This point was made in “The Case for Retraction on Grounds of Academic Misconduct” dated February 18, 2021.<sup>(71)</sup> These scholars probably took action because they felt that Ramseyer’s paper would overturn their claims.

### **Questionable ability to read and comprehend Japanese documents**

However, “the violation of an international convention” is mentioned in the context that unscrupulous recruiters whose activities border on human trafficking should be strictly controlled. The document does not say that “violation of international convention” should be “condoned”. That is why it demands strict checks in the second and subsequent items. In particular, the minimum age of 21 or higher is in consideration of the minimum age in the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children (except that the minimum age was 17 in Korea and 16 in Taiwan).

What the document says shall be “condoned” is “traveling of women for the purpose of prostitution,” while Japanese women are banned from traveling to China in principle.

This is the interpretation of that part when read in an unaffected manner. Some may have no tolerance for “prostitution” but this profession was permitted in those days. Therefore, “condoning” women traveling with the purpose of engaging in that type of work in China did not violate the international convention.

As I explained earlier, neither the comfort women system nor the individual comfort stations (relevant people) were prosecuted even at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, which passed other severe judgments on Japan. The comfort women system and individual comfort stations were not regarded as problematic. Earlier reports and U.S. Army documents I read did not consider these as violation of international convention or as war crimes.

At the time of the Coomaraswamy Report in 1994, the U.S. did not support the opinion of Special Rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy, that Japan should pay compensation for violating international law, and simply closed the matter with a resolution of condemnation, rather than seek punishment. It is an unreasonable interpretation to say that the document says that Japan, at that time, “condoned” acts in violation of international law.

Seen in this light, it appears to me that Gordon’s and Eckert’s criticism, which then went on to influence many other scholars, and the statement demanding the retraction of Ramseyer’s paper is “an argument for some ulterior motive.” Their criticism is not based on academic convention. They are apparently ignoring, without just reasons, the facts as Ramseyer stated. Rather, Gordon’s and Eckert’s criticism made me doubt their Japanese proficiency and their ability to read and comprehend Japanese documents such as those mentioned as references.

This point applies to many of the criticisms by Western scholars who followed them.

It must have been quite exhausting to argue back against many Western scholars with various specialties who criticized for the purpose of criticizing while translating the documents in Japanese as mentioned earlier.

I personally feel that this is like the Inquisition against Galileo Galilei.

## Notes

(68) “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>

(69) “Situations in 1938 of Japanese special women residing in the area, control of them and the concession authorities' regulation of unlicensed prostitution,” Yoshimi Yoshiaki ed. *Jugun Ianfu Shiryo-shu* (A Collection of Documents on Military Comfort Women), p. 184

(70) Yoshimi Yoshiaki ed. *Jugun Ianfu Shiryo-shu*, pp. 102 - 104

(71) “Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War”: The Case for Retraction on Grounds of Academic Misconduct <https://sites.google.com/view/concernedhistorians>