

Chapter 10: Did the Signatories of the Petition for Retraction Read the Ramseyer Article?

Why critics say that there is no supporting data

The Ramseyer paper devotes considerable space to the references. That is, it has been written referring to a tremendous amount of data. Most of the references are documents in Japanese created before and during the WWII period. They include a fairly large number of primary sources such as records, reports and notices issued by military and police authorities. I would like readers to read his paper included at the end of this book and check for him or herself.

The individual references are already known and have been used by other researchers but there has been no precedent for such an exhaustive use such as presented by Ramseyer. He has written his paper based on such a large amount of data that even Japanese scholars are surprised. Naturally his paper was reviewed and published in an authoritative academic journal.

Some critics say that the paper “slipped through” peer review but they are ill-informed of the peer review system of academic journals of this level.

So why has the paper been bashed as “lacking supporting data”?

One possible reason is that most of the primary sources in the References list are in Japanese and written with military or government terminology of that era.

Very often, professors teaching Japanese history or other Japan-related studies at universities and other institutions speak fluent Japanese but cannot even read a newspaper. This is an undeniable fact. It is easy to see from the articles or books they have written. They cite little or no literature in the Japanese language as references. They teach about Japan at universities based on books and papers written in English and write their books and articles based on these references.

Speaking in their favor, however, it is extremely difficult for Westerners to read *kanji*. People who use phonograms, an alphabet-based system, have difficulty beyond our

imagination in reading and understanding ideograms, or *kanji*. In fact, this applies to Koreans, who also use phonograms--*Hangul*.

Can they read documents written with specialist terms?

I cannot help but shake my head in confusion when I see university instructors from the West, especially the U.S., criticize Ramseyer's paper as "lacking in supporting data".

I think the "United States Office of War Information Interrogation Report" mentioned in Chapter 7 is more than sufficient but, if they insist that they need more references, then they can read the primary sources written in Japanese listed in the References. The point is whether they have actually read the Japanese literature Ramseyer mentioned as references. I wonder if they read those references to see if they were properly used and cited.

In the first place, can they read these documents full of specialist terms written in styles peculiar to military and police authorities? This would probably make them upset, but I am actually asking them this question out of interest. I myself am little embarrassed to say that prewar literature is sometimes too difficult to read without the help of a colleague who teaches Japanese history. That should show how difficult it is to read these documents.

The reason why I put forward doubts is that I saw a media report saying that about 919 economists showed their support for the rebuke written by Michael Chwe, Chair of the Department of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). (The statement is detailed in a blog entry dated February 25, 2021 by Kan Takeuchi, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Economics, Hitotsubashi University, under the title, "An article by a Harvard University professor making a game theory-ish assertion that 'comfort women voluntarily made a contract' meets with vehement objection from game theorists.")

The statement criticizes Ramseyer's analyses and hypotheses. Simply put, it claim that "there are no grounds" for Ramseyer's analyses and hypotheses. However, what how many of "political science" and "economics" scholars all over the world are capable of reading documents in Japanese? And did they read the "United States Office of War Information Interrogation Report" that Ramseyer mentioned as evidence is support of his

paper? If the critics are claiming that this document is insufficient, then they have an obligation to read the other Japanese documents. In short, I suspect that they supported the statement without really reading its content.

Confusion between game theory and morals

Chwe also makes the following argument, which is his criticism on by Ramseyer on the use of economic game theory.

“Game-theoretic principles can be used to interpret many coercive situations, from crime and punishment to nuclear warfare. But invoking game theory does not establish the absence of violent exploitation or predation.”

This statement confuses game theory with morals and fails any test of logic. There is no problem with criticizing a scholarly article. However, at the very least, before making a criticism, the article and its sources should be read very carefully.

Citizens' groups have the freedom to voice an opinion such as the “comfort women are definitely sex slaves and denying it is impermissible.” However, nobody in academia should be allowed to take a sloppy approach to rebutting the papers of other. Taking a skeptical view of what people regard as “definite” and to verify is part of the job of academics.

The South Korean media reported that thousands of scientists, including a Nobel laureate, expressed their support for the statement. However, I have to wonder what proportion of overseas “scientists” can read official Japanese documents from the WWII period. I would very much like to know if such scientists exist.

To prevent misunderstanding, let me add that I do not deny the right of criticizing the comfort women system of the old days. Numerous acts in history look barbaric through the “modern eyes”. We should embrace the lessons learned from history and use them today. I hear that people of a certain country committed acts of violence against local women during the Vietnam War and such acts must be condemned.

However, mixing the current sense of values in an academic paper like Ramseyer's should be avoided. The discussion is entirely on how concerned parties in those days thought and

acted and incorporating a view that “an inhumane act incredible to the eyes of modern people” only precludes fact-finding.

Agreed between Japan and South Korea in 2015

One point that can be assumed as a question to raise is whether it was a permissible act in light of law and institutions of those days. If the comfort women system was recognized as a problem, even back then, what brought about the situation would be valid point of inquiry. If it was not the case yet asserting the comfort women system was “impermissible because it is an impermissible act through the eyes of present people” is merely propaganda or forcing one’s speech on others.

To make an additional point, Japan and South Korea agreed in 2015 that representing comfort women as “sex slaves” “contradicts the facts” and the expression “sex slaves” “should not be used.” The fact that South Korea as well as Japan agreed to this point is clearly stated in an official document published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan—and I wonder if critics are aware of this.⁽⁷²⁾

The problem with the apparently reasonable demand to “show evidence”

Jeannie Suk Gersen, Ramseyer’s colleague, says in her critique against him that “academic freedom comes with the responsibility, when making claims about facts, to have proper grounding in evidence.” Critics are demanding Ramseyer to “present grounds” or “provide evidence with sources.” However, it is obvious from what I have described so far why Ramseyer cannot meet their demands immediately.

That is, he has already shown grounds and evidence with the “United States Office of War Information Interrogation Report.” He also mentioned other pieces of evidence, in sources such as Japanese language documents but those making demands lack proficiency in Japanese. Thus, to show “grounds and evidence”, Ramseyer would have to translate an enormous amount of Japanese documents into English—a Herculean labor.

At Harvard University, April is the end of the term. It was during this period when everything happened. It would have been impossible to fit such a task into his busy schedule with academic affairs and classes. If he translated all his references, some might then state “the translation is wrong.”

Being subjected to severe bashing by the South Korean media and irresponsible American scientists alone is an ordeal beyond Ramseyer's imagination and unreasonable demands from scholars without Japanese language skills are placing additional burdens on him. One can hardly feel sorry enough for him.

Notes

(72) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan "Japan's Efforts on the Issue of Comfort Women"
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000472256.pdf>