

Chapter 2: The Fiction Equating Comfort Women with Sex Slaves Spreads throughout the World

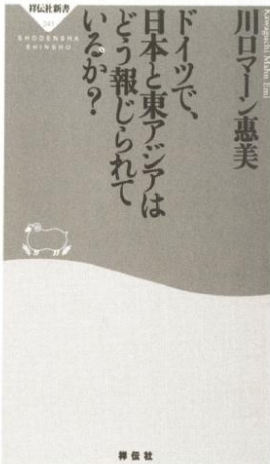
E. The tone of German media coverage of comfort women

By Emi Kawaguchi-Mahn



It is unlikely that residents of Japan properly know how much distress the comfort-women controversy has caused Japanese nationals living in foreign countries. Sankei Shimbun reporter Komori Yoshihisa expressed our dilemma aptly when he wrote, “Words cannot express how helpless and alone I felt during the debate over comfort women in the US.”¹

I live in Germany, and I know exactly how Mr. Komori felt. In the face of a concentrated attack, I couldn’t hope for support or cover. If I had been in Japan, I would have been comforted by the knowledge that even if opinions diverged, at the very least, everyone would be familiar with the arguments presented and the underlying circumstances.



It is nearly impossible to advise Germans about the comfort-women controversy. There are so many aspects that must be explained, including who the comfort women were and what they did, and past and present relations between Japan and Korea. It is of paramount importance to shed light on the Asahi Shimbun’s role in the controversy, and why a false report ended up taking on a life of its own. Unfortunately, the German media ignore these aspects of the controversy, focusing instead on horror stories, and the “sex-slave” tragedy.

Cover of a book by Emi Kawaguchi-Mahn about German media coverage of Japan and East Asia. What I believed to be the truth is incomprehensible to my family and my German friends. I am neither a scholar nor a politician. If I would speak out different from the media reports I would not have any chance to convince. The same goes for the Nanjing “massacre.” In Germany, false reports about pollution in Fukushima run rampant, and

¹ Komori Yoshihisa, “Asahi Shimbun no ianfu kyoho wa Nihon ni doredake no jitsugai wo ataeta no ka” (How much harm the false report in the Asahi Shimbun did Japan), *Japan Business Press*, 20 August 2014. <http://jbpress.ismedia.jp/articles/-/41520> (retrieved 07/01/2016).

are never questioned. If I raise objections, then I am viewed as someone with questionable ideology.

But I cannot simply resign myself to defeat and put the controversy behind me. It becomes a knot of anger in my stomach that continually torments me.

The following article appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, one of Germany's leading dailies. The author is Carsten Germis, the newspaper's foreign correspondent based in Tokyo.

November 18, 2014

MISREPRESENTATION OF HISTORY: JAPAN DEMANDS CORRECTIONS TO AMERICAN TEXTBOOKS

Historical revisionism has entered a new phase: Japanese foreign minister intends to effect changes in US textbooks. This is nothing more than resistance against the current state of historical research.

For the first time Japan is exerting pressure on foreign textbooks in order to whitewash its atrocities during World War II. In a statement made on Tuesday in Tokyo, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said that the Japanese government had criticized an account in a history textbook used in the US. The authors are historians Jerry Bentley and Herbert Ziegler, and in the account in question they maintain that the Japanese Army compelled 200,000 women to serve as military prostitutes in East Asia.

The book simply states the results of unbiased historical research. However, such research has become the target of criticism from nationalists and revisionists, who have gained ascendancy since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration took office. The foreign minister maintains that the offending account does not accord with the Japanese government's official position. Kishida did not say exactly which part of the account met with his disapproval.

The fact that Japan is now putting pressure on foreign researchers is a sign of a new intensity to its government's revisionism. The American publisher McGraw-Hill has stated that it is prepared to mediate a dialogue between the authors and Japanese diplomats.

Japan has officially acknowledged that women were forced to serve as prostitutes during the war. But at home, in Abe's sphere, this is vehemently denied.²

² Carsten Germis, "Geschichtsklitterung: Japan verlangt Korrektur amerikanischer Lehrbücher (Misrepresentation of history: Japan seeks amendment of history textbook), *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 18 November 2014. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/asien/geschichtsklitterung-japan-verlangt-korrektur-amerikanischer-lehrbuecher-13272998.html> (retrieved 07/01/2016).

To illustrate this article Germis uses a photograph of Japanese schoolgirls walking together, their schoolbags on their backs. The caption under the photograph: “Schoolchildren in Tokyo: What will they be given to read?”

Here is another of Germis’ articles.

January 29, 2015

Sex Slaves in Japan

THE TERM “COMFORT WOMEN” UNDERMINES THE BAD REPUTATION

In Japan tens of thousands of women and girls were forced to be sex slaves during World War II. Nationalist powers are using a newspaper’s mistake to rewrite history.

On Monday more than 8,700 Japanese instituted suit against the liberal daily Asahi Shimbun in Tokyo District Court. Their grievance: the newspaper had disseminated lies throughout the world by claiming that Japan bore responsibility for the so-called comfort women. The term is used to describe women who were forced to serve as prostitutes in brothels operated by the Japanese Army in battle zones; the great majority of them were Korean. Behind the lawsuit was an apology from the Asahi Shimbun for a series of articles that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly those produced by an eyewitness named Seiji Yoshida. Yoshida was exposed as a liar at a later date. His false witness notwithstanding, the newspaper did not deny (nor should it have!) that tens of thousands of women and girls had been forced to become sex slaves under Japanese rule. The plaintiffs also castigated the newspaper for not making an effort to restore Japan’s honor within the international community.

In the historical research community outside Japan, it is an undisputed fact that the Japanese forced 200,000 women and girls to become sex slaves. Even the Japanese government acknowledged responsibility for those evil deeds (at least in international circles) in a statement issued in the 1990s. But at home Prime Minister Abe Shinzo used the apology issued by Asahi Shimbun last fall to strengthen his own nationalist course and the increasingly aggressive historical revisionism of Japan’s nationalists. Speaking before Japan’s Diet, Abe said that the Asahi Shimbun had seriously injured Japan’s reputation, and that he is determined to restore Japanese pride. Japan’s Foreign Ministry added what was clearly a rebuttal of criticism from foreign correspondents concerning Abe’s position on this subject, and provocative nationalist language. The lawsuit filed in Tokyo is in perfect alignment with this trend. According to the complaint, there is no evidence proving that any official Japanese institution forced women into prostitution, and Asahi has tarnished Japan’s reputation in the eyes of the world. The plaintiffs are suing for compensation from the newspaper amounting to ¥10,000 (ca. 80 Euros) per person. International media reports are critical not of Asahi for issuing a false report, but of Abe’s

shameless attempt to whitewash Japanese atrocities committed during World War II. Japanese media have given the topic very little attention.

Pressure on the media intensifies

Kaori Hayashi, professor of communications theory at Tokyo University, calls what Japan's prime minister does "effective agenda-setting." As a member of a committee established by the Asahi Shimbun, Hayashi has analyzed a great deal of the foreign media coverage of the "Asahi scandal." She found absolutely no criticism of the Asahi Shimbun. The foreign media are, without exception, critical of Abe's attempt to make a scapegoat of a liberal newspaper in his drive to achieve a nationalist agenda. Prime Minister Abe took advantage of a newspaper's erroneous report to deny the fact of forced prostitution. This despite the fact that one exposed liar does not cast doubt on the entire body of independent academic research. Furthermore, 20 years have elapsed since then. Yoshida's hoax was already public knowledge in the 1990s. As far as the historical assessment of forced prostitution is concerned, Asahi's apology means absolutely nothing outside Japan.

As the Asahi Shimbun experienced, the government in Tokyo put powerful pressure on a newspaper, and extracted an apology from it. The recent lawsuit is the next step toward suppressing liberal voices in Japan. Abe and nationalist organizations that have joined hands with him have stepped up the pressure on Asahi's executives — after Abe's administration took office in December 2012 the newspaper was one of the most influential opposition voices in Japan. Many Asahi reporters feel that they have been deprived of freedom of speech.

Angela Merkel should admonish Prime Minister Abe

According to a report from Kyodo News the lawsuit is expected to have 13,000 plaintiffs. That is because the Asahi article disseminated the perception that Japan bore responsibility for sex slaves throughout the world. The nationalist, conservative Yomiuri newspaper apologized to its readership for using the term "sex slaves" in its reporting. To Japan's nationalists, Korean teenagers forced into prostitution were no different from ordinary prostitutes.

The fact that Hayashi's analysis demonstrates that it was historical revisionists, not Asahi, who sullied Japan's image will not cause concern among the plaintiffs. Shoichi Watanabe, professor emeritus of Sophia University, a Christian institution, has orchestrated this lawsuit, in which thousands of people are participating. From this fact alone we see how aggressive the plaintiffs' nationalist power has become. On the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, Prime Minister Abe declared that he would conduct a reassessment of history. Prime Minister Merkel will be visiting Japan in March. She should say a few straightforward words to Abe about the proper approach to history.

The accompanying photograph shows former comfort women protesting at a demonstration.³

It is not at all difficult to imagine how Germans, who know nothing about the circumstances, reacted to this article. The foreign media's stance on the comfort-women controversy hasn't changed at all during the years between Asahi Shimbun's shrill insistence that the comfort women were coerced, and the newspaper's apology for publishing false reports. Moreover, Germis brands Prime Minister Abe as a nationalist who bullied the Asahi Shimbun into admitting it had issued false reports, in an attempt to rewrite history. Germis' scenario makes Abe and the suspicious forces aligned with him the villains, and the Asahi Shimbun, the victim striving to combat Abe's oppression. Nothing could be further away from the truth. Exactly who is using the comfort-women controversy to further their agendas? Joining forces with the Asahi Shimbun are not only Korea and China, but also the European and American media.

Again, I must emphasize that it is impossible for the reader of an article written with such an intent (I might as well call it evil intent, as that is what it is) to learn the truth. Nor does it matter what the Foreign Ministry says; it can't possibly prevail. Articles like these are designed to tug at the emotions. They may contain terms like "historical fact" and "scholars' opinions" in abundance, but they are certainly not engaged in an honest quest for the truth, so they can inform their readers accurately. Accuracy has no importance to them.

I can't help but conclude that, in most cases, reporters' top priority is to provoke sympathy for the comfort women and anger toward the Japanese for attempting to justify atrocities. What has made the German media so hostile toward Japan?

In the second article Germis writes, "Prime Minister Abe took advantage of a newspaper's erroneous report to deny the fact of forced prostitution." The Foreign Ministry issued a protest against this accusation. On no occasion did the prime minister ever say that the comfort women had never existed, so Germis' accusation was completely spurious.

Germis retaliated by writing "Confessions of a foreign correspondent," an article critical of the Japanese government; it appeared in the April 2015 issue of the "Number 1 Shimbun," the house organ of the FCCJ (Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan). In it he praises Hatoyama Yukio, Kan Naoto, and Okada Katsuya to the skies, and excoriates Japan and Prime Minister Abe's historical revisionism.⁴

³ Carsten Germis, "Sexsklavinnen in Japan: 'Trostfrauen' erschüttern den schlechten Ruf" (Sex slaves In Japan: comfort women shake up a bad reputation), *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 29 January 2015. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/klage-gegen-zeitung-asahi-wegen-rufbeschaeedigung-japans-13391702.html> (retrieved 07/01/2016).

⁴ <http://www.fccj.or.jp/number-1-shimbun/item/576-on-my-watch/576-on-my-watch.html> (retrieved 07/01/2016).

In the same article, whose target audience is foreign correspondents based in Japan, Germis writes that “Japan is a democracy with freedom of the press,” so perhaps he selects different content and tone for his main audience, i.e., general German readers. What surprised me the most about these “confessions” are the comments of approval posted by Japanese readers. Do they really believe that nationalists are gaining strength in Japan?

I’ve been following German news coverage closely for the past 10 years. During that time I’ve noticed that there is a greater degree of freedom of ideological expression in Japan than in Germany. There are certain topics that leading German media companies cannot write about. In contrast, if the Japanese media avoid a topic, it is likely they do so out of diffidence, or defensiveness, or because an advertiser might object, but their failure to cover it is voluntary.

On February 29, 2012 members of the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) submitted a resolution entitled “Recognition of and Compensation for the Suffering of the Comfort Women”⁵ to the Lower House of the German Parliament. It was modeled on US House of Representatives Resolution 121.⁶

The German resolution urges the Japanese government to acknowledge the crimes committed by Japan’s Imperial Army, and to offer apologies and compensation to the victims of those crimes. The signers of the motion are prominent politicians.

On November 29, 2012 representatives of the various political parties delivered speeches about the motion. In hers, Ute Koczy, representing the Alliance ‘90/The Green Party, claimed that more than 200,000 women and girls were forced into prostitution at military brothels.

The youngest of the comfort women were 11 or 12 years old. They were abducted or lured under false pretenses. Seventy percent of the women forced into prostitution died from sexual abuse, were executed, or committed suicide. Finally, in 1991, a former comfort woman named Kim Hak-sun came forward. The Japanese government’s behavior toward her was shameful; they might as well have punched her in the face.⁷

⁵ German title: “Anerkennung und Wiedergutmachung des Leids der “Trostrfrauen.”

⁶ Full title: A resolution expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as “comfort women”, during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II.

⁷ <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/parlament/bundestagsreden/2012/november/ute-koczy-trostrfrauen.html> (retrieved 07/06/16).

Ute Granold, representing the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), made the following remarks:

Historians estimate the number of victims at 200,000-300,000. Most of the victims were from China or Korea. Those were places where Japanese troops committed the most violent abuses.

(...)

Words cannot describe the horrors the women experienced. Most of them died of disease, torture, starvation, or exhaustion.

(...)

In [1992] historians located proof in military records that the Japanese Army abducted women for service in military brothels.

(...)

The existence of evidence forced the Japanese government to include this chapter of World War II history in textbooks. But during the past few years, a certain group of politicians has made a concerted effort to expunge all suggestions of these crimes from textbooks, and have succeeded in doing so.

And even more astonishing:

The emperor of Japan had comfort stations — military brothels — established for his troops.

(...)

Forced prostitution was ordained and institutionalized by the national government.

She concludes with the following self-congratulatory remark:

There is no point in attempting to change the Japanese government's position from outside. Warnings from other countries will have little effect. We Germans have set a good example for the Japanese by demonstrating of our own volition of a culture of sincere reconciliation and remorse, enabling us to deepen a synthesis of the past, and strengthen our understanding of neighboring countries.⁸

In the end, the resolution was not adopted. But its content was widely publicized. Therefore, its selling point, i.e., that the Japanese ran rampant throughout Asia, committing atrocities wherever they went. Rather than showing remorse for their actions,

⁸ <https://www.cducsu.de/themen/menschenrechte-und-humanitaere-hilfe/zwangsprostitution-japan-waehrend-des-zweiten-weltkriegs-als-menschenrechtsverletzung-ankennen> (retrieved 7/21/2016).

they are attempting to justify them. This is the message that has been imprinted on the minds of the German people. Germis' articles are sending virtually the same message. If I were German, I might have believed them.

But members of the German Federal Diet are not ordinary Germans. It is very likely that they are well aware that German troops really did force women into prostitution, and that must be why they are attacking Japan. But why? To what end?

During Hitler's rule, German troops operated brothels on a large scale — in Germany, in war zones, and in German colonies and occupied territory. There were several types of brothels, for rank-and-file soldiers, for officers, for the paramilitary Schutzstaffel (SS) personnel, and for laborers recruited from other countries. Surprisingly, brothels were also established in concentration camps and extermination camps.

My purpose is not to discuss German forced prostitution, but I would like to refer interested readers to books written by Christa Paul⁹ and Franz Seidler.¹⁰ Evidence of the practices they chronicle (original documents) can be found in Nürnberg (Nuremberg) at the Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds (Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände).

At the beginning of this section I referred to journalist Komori Yoshihisa. Here is another of his comments: "I consider myself a victim of the comfort-women controversy ... I feel as though not only Japan's honor, but also my own honor has been damaged."

In closing, I would like to mention that in the media coverage of the false report issued by the Asahi Shimbun, one of Germany's leading dailies, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, carried an article with the headline "Prime Minister vs. Newspaper." This was followed by the subtitle "Japan's prime minister intends to get rid of a nuisance, the Asahi Shimbun, which has been critical of him." The tone of the article reminds me of Germis' writing. Other newspapers offer more or less the same type of coverage. German opposition to and hatred of Japan appear to be deep-rooted.

The Asahi Shimbun's admission of its errors is to be commended, but it had no effect in Germany. Some wrongs cannot be made right. I can't help thinking that the German media were determined *not* to acknowledge the correction.

BBC's international broadcast World Service conducted a poll in 2014 asking how people in various countries view other countries. According to the poll results apparently the Chinese have the most negative view of Japan, followed by South Koreans, and then

⁹ Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich Errichtete Bordelle Im Nationalsozialismus* (Forced Prostitution: Brothels Established by the National Socialist State) (Berlin: Edition Heinrich, 1994).

¹⁰ Franz Seidler, *Prostitution, Homosexualität, Selbstverstümmelung. Probleme der deutschen Sanitätsführung 1939–1945* (Prostitution, homosexuality, masturbation: problems of the German Medical Service, 1939-45) (Neckargemünd: [Vowinkel-Verlag](#), 1977).

Germans!¹¹ This is a tragic situation. As a Japanese woman who lives in Germany, I am more saddened than angry.

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2014/world-service-country-poll> (retrieved 07/21/2016).