

February 19, 2024 Joint Japan/South Korea/America Press Conference
Commemorating the Publication of *Kanzen Rompa*

I am honored to be here today. But there is more than a decade of personal and international history intertwined in the background of my appearance at this press conference.

Some ten years ago I was a doctoral exchange student at Waseda Law School in Tokyo. During my stay at Waseda, the *Asahi Shimbun* retracted much of its past reporting on the comfort women. I had not studied the comfort women before then, and my knowledge of comfort women history was shallow at best. But when the paper of record in Japan retracted more than twenty years' worth of articles on the comfort women due to distortions of fact and numerous outright falsehoods, I took notice.

As a graduate student in the United States, I had heard that the comfort women were sex slaves dragooned at bayonet point by the Japanese military. I had heard that there were two hundred thousand comfort women, or as many as four hundred thousand according to some scholars. I had heard that the women were massacred by the tens of thousands at war's end. It turns out that none of this is remotely true. How could so many people in American academia—thousands of people, many of whom I had often heard boasting of their prestigious degrees from Ivy League institutions—be so completely wrong about something so important as the history of World War II in Asia? Some of the people under whose guidance I was studying at my home institution, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, professed to be “experts” on that very history. And yet, they were among the most insistent that the malignant fable which the *Asahi* had disavowed was gospel truth.

Meanwhile, I learned of scholars in Japan and South Korea who were not content with narratives, and who set out to find out what really happened.

During my time at Waseda I happened to meet Professor Nishioka Tsutomu, who has spent his life studying the shared history of Japan and the Korean peninsula. Professor Nishioka gave me a book in English about the comfort women. I read it. I was shocked. Virtually nothing about the comfort women that American academics argued had any basis in documentary fact. Much of it was, further, divorced from common sense. I was ashamed so easily to have believed such patently false assertions.

I also met, and read work by, Professor Hirakawa Sukehiro, a specialist in cultural comparison with a command of some half-dozen languages, Professor Hata Ikuhiko, the author of the still-standard volume on the comfort women and the doyen of modern history in Japan, Professor Yamashita Eiji, an economic specialist, Professor Fujioka Nobukatsu, who has spent decades investigating modern East Asian history, Ms. Yamamoto Yumiko, an expert in Japan-Korean labor history, and many other researchers. I was deeply impressed by their sincerity, careful approach to scholarship, dedication, and thorough research methods.

Later, I learned of the work of scholars in South Korea working on similar topics: Professor Rhee Younghoon of the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research and former economics professor at Seoul National University, Dr. Lee Wooyoun, also of the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research and an expert on economic history, Professor Park Yuha, a Sejong University literature scholar writing about the interpersonal interactions of comfort women and Japanese soldiers, Professor Lew Seokchoon, former Yonsei University professor and expert in sociology, Kim Byunghoon, who has investigated the comfort women movement in South Korea, and many others. Many South Korean scholars face civil lawsuits and jail time for speaking the truth about history—all while the American academics glibly repeat lies. I was deeply ashamed to know that people in my own country's academic system played a role in the censorship and witch hunts carried out against honest scholars in South Korea.

This year, 2024, Harvard Law School professor J. Mark Ramseyer and I published a book called *The Comfort Women Hoax*. In it, we take up the history of the comfort women issue, the ways in which so-called scholars in the United States repeat North Korean propaganda about the comfort women, and how, again, so-called scholars in the United States have waged cancellation campaigns against anyone in South Korea, Japan, North America, or elsewhere who has dared to follow the facts and his or her conscience in defying the pat comfort-woman narrative which even the *Asahi Shimbun* has foresaken. The contents of our book overlap in many ways with the *Kanzen Rompa* book, on the publication of which I extend to Dr. Fujioka and his co-editors and -translators, as well as to Dr. Ramseyer, my hearty congratulations.

Congratulations are certainly in order, but so is deep reflection. What Professor Ramseyer and I write in *The Comfort Women Hoax* differs very little from what scholars in East Asia have been saying, and occasionally put on trial for saying, for decades. Why did American academics ignore their Asian colleagues for so long? Why did they call them “fascists,” “ultra-nationalists,” “Holocaust deniers,” and “frauds”? Why did they call Professor Ramseyer a “white supremacist” and “racist” when he came forward with his own interpretation of comfort women history, one which tracked substantially what Asian scholars have been writing for decades? Why did Northwestern University professor Amy Stanley delight in being called an “academic assassin” (by a fellow white American academic, no less) for leading a “woke mob” against Professor Ramseyer for investigating comfort women history? Why did so many people join Professor Stanley’s “woke mob” instead of listening to what non-white scholars had to say about their own countries’ history?

Sadly, in the way that American academics have treated their Asian colleagues, one sees that the old colonial mentality remains as strong as ever in the United States. The American so-called scholars continue to censor and suppress whatever does not fit the narrative they curate. If only the Americans would learn from their Japanese and South Korean counterparts, as I have been blessed to learn from them, how to tell the historical truth.

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