

An Inquiry to MWC, MCUSA, MMN, MCC, Mennonite Congregation of Boston Concerning, the Issue of Professor J. Mark Ramseyer's Publication, "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War"

We, the members of the Mennonite Church South Korea(MCSK) wish you peace, and peace on earth.

In February 2021, Korean media outlets reported the online publication of a revisionist article on the issue of "comfort women" written by an American professor. "Comfort women" refers to an estimated 200,000 women of many nationalities, of whom the vast majority were Korean, who were forced into Japanese military-run brothels during World War II. The publication and the instant backlash that followed was frontpage news in Korea for days. We first thought of this Harvard professor as 'just another academic who is distorting historical facts in efforts of serving patrons of Japanese background'. After all, such cases have not been so uncommon. However, we became deeply troubled when we learned that the author of this ill-informed and ill-intentioned paper is a fellow member of the Mennonite church, and the son of prominent Mennonite witnesses.

There are 4 Mennonite congregations and 2 Anabaptist groups in South Korea. Living in a divided nation that has been surviving a 70-year-old ceasefire, we affirm peace and reconciliation as a central part of our faith. We consider J. Mark Ramseyer as our brother in Christ, and we would like to ask him about his understanding of the history of Japanese Empire in regards to Korea and other Asian nations that Japan invaded and/or colonized. We invite J. Mark Ramseyer, his congregation, and all related parties to this dialogue.

1. There are a lot of statements, petitions, and articles that call out the lack of scholarly integrity and the omission of the larger political and economic contexts of colonialism and gender in J. Mark Ramseyer's article. Here we attach the link(<https://rijs.fas.harvard.edu/news/statement-reischauer-institute-japanese-studies-0>) to the statement issued by the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies where Ramseyer himself is serving as a faculty member. In this statement you will be able to find links to three different public responses made by other academics. Reading those articles will give you some background information on this issue and help you understand the pain and the rage that your Korean and other Asian sisters and brothers are experiencing.
2. We are opening up this dialogue because we consider you, Mennonites in North American including J. Mark Ramseyer, as our brothers and sisters in Christ. We expect the elders or leaders of each congregation to admonish members of their wrongdoing. If a certain member inflicts pain and suffering on the victims of war crimes, and on other sisters and brothers in different parts of the world by abusing history, we believe the issue must be discussed openly and thoroughly, and necessary course of action must be taken.
3. It is to our knowledge that the Mennonite church in the United States has a long history with the Mennonite church in Japan working together on the issue of atomic bombings. Japan is indeed the unfortunate victim of aforementioned violence, but is also the perpetrator of massive violence during Japanese Empire's 35 years of forced annexation of Korea, and invasion and colonization of parts of East Asia, Western Pacific, and Southeast Asia. Following Japan's surrender to the U.S. in 1945 began 70 years of recrimination, apology, and denial over its wartime atrocities including the issue of "comfort women". We do not have any knowledge of what role the Japanese Mennonite community played during and after the war. However, by examining a series of J. Mark Ramseyer's publications and interviews, we have learned that his

understanding of Japanese colonial history seems to be very different from the views shared by rest of Asia and the general consensus of the international community. This latest article does not seem to be a mistake or an aberration. In a separate article, J. Mark Ramseyer have claimed that the account that Korean women were forced, coerced, and deceived into sexual servitude and confined under threat of violence is “pure fiction.” In another publication, regarding the issue of 1923 massacre of Koreans and other minorities in Japan, he casts doubts on the estimated number of victims and at the same time characterizes young Koreans as a “high crime group.” These are some examples of how J. Mark Ramseyer’s views are strikingly similar to those championed by revisionist, conservative-nationalist political groups in Japan known for their denials and rationalizations concerning Japan’s wartime crimes. We conjecture that his experience growing up in Japan helped shape his views on history, and the fact that he grew up in a Mennonite home makes us question the possible role Mennonites may have played in that experience.

4. The trauma caused by Japanese imperialism and the atrocities it committed before and during World War II still looms large over many Asian nations. The survivors of “comfort stations”, “forced labor camps”, and “massacres” are still alive and are testifying. Japanese government has been using J. Mark Ramseyer’s work and the likes as a tool in perverting the truth of what took place in Asia during the first half of the 20th century. We are aware that J. Mark Ramseyer has received Japanese support in the past. It is also appropriate to point out that his official title is Mitsubishi Professor of Japanese Legal Studies. Mitsubishi is a Japanese firm that was responsible for manufacturing military aircraft and weapons for the Japanese government during World War II, and committed several war crimes itself.

Mennonite Church South Korea would like to ask you to communicate with J. Mark Ramseyer about his work and his actions which are inflicting more pain on the victims of wartime atrocities by reaffirming the perpetrator’s claims. Many Asians are deeply hurting. “Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War” has drawn enough attention that thousands of scholars, government officials and civic groups worldwide have expressed their concern and outrage(one such example is the letter in the following link signed by more than 2,000 researchers: <http://chwe.net/irle/letter>). However, such acts of distortion can always reoccur. And if that is the case, such atrocities may repeat itself to anyone, anywhere including Asian Americans in the U.S. Alexis Dudden, an historian of Japan and Korea observes that the reason for studying past atrocities is to try to prevent similar occurrences in the future, “not to abuse history by weaponizing it for present purposes.”

We are experiencing feelings of serious pain, outrage, and confusion over what an American Mennonite brother has done. We look forward to an informed discussion within your community. We are ready to communicate openly with you on this matter.

Mennonite Church South Korea

Yongha Bae, General Secretary

