

February 24, 2021

Dear Eric,

Thank you for the offer to publish with IRLE. As we previously stated, we have decided to forgo that option. Instead, we have published our findings as an open letter [here](#) and [here](#).

We still have some clarifying questions regarding the investigation process at IRLE, and how the board intends to address our case for retraction on the grounds of academic misconduct. We ask these questions to establish how seriously the board and the publisher take into consideration the historically inaccurate claims and faulty sources we found embedded in the article. At the same time, we think these questions might also be helpful to members of the editorial board as they consider how to respond to the issues we have raised.

We have added these questions to our open letter in the publicly shared document. No matter what you decide about retraction, in the interest of pursuing an open dialogue about issues of academic integrity and academic freedom, we invite you to publish your responses on our website.

1. We understand the ultimate decision to retract will lie with the publisher. Under what circumstances would the board recommend to the publisher to retract?
2. What steps would be taken if the author does not provide satisfactory responses to the claims we lay out in our fact-checking document, or if the author flatly denies the charges without providing any further support or citation? More specifically, we would like the board to respond to our claims as follows:
  - a. As we state, the author has not consulted a single signed contract or even a sample contract that was known to have been used in Korea. While this does not prove that no such contract ever existed in Korea, it does prove the author has not produced any such documents. If the author merely states that for reasons of his own he believes there were such contracts in Korea (without producing any signed contract or sample contract that sources specifically attribute as having been used in Korea), and they were widely, even universally, employed, from the board's perspective, would such assertion on the author's part be sufficient to avoid retraction?
  - b. Also, if it is proved that the author used selective quoting and the fuller context we provided in our document effectively establishes opposite views, would this use of sources be considered a "falsification" of data that would warrant the board to recommend a retraction? In particular, we point out the cases of mischaracterized testimony in the two individual cases presented in the article -- that of Osaki (Yamazaki, *Sandakan hachiban shōkan*) and of Mun Ok-ju. Would the board decide that, since this is not a history journal, selective quoting and tendentious interpretation of the sources would not qualify as grounds for retraction?

- c. Beyond these major issues, what is the board's position regarding the many other incorrect and missing citations? If the author refuses to correct these citations, would the board recommend a retraction?
3. Finally, if the board considers the allegations and the matters of discrepancies raised to be serious but is not equipped to come to a conclusion on its own, would the board recommend hiring an independent expert on Japanese history to assess the differences, or would the board simply defer to the author's position?

Best wishes,

Amy Stanley  
Professor of History  
Northwestern University

Hannah Shepherd  
Junior Research Fellow in Japanese and Korean History  
University of Cambridge

Sayaka Chatani  
Assistant Professor of History  
National University of Singapore

David Ambaras  
Professor of History  
North Carolina State University

Chelsea Szendi Schieder  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics  
Aoyama Gakuin University