

# Contradictory Understandings of “Abduction”: Reflections on two Controversies 「拉致」に対する相反する解釈 二つの問題の再考

Uesugi Satoshi

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*The following passages are excerpted from Prof. Uesugi Satoshi’s important consideration of inherent paradoxes in Japanese society today involving, on the one hand, an intense determination to resolve [North Korea’s “abduction”](#) of Japanese nationals during the late 1970s and 80s, and on the other hand, an equally apparent determination to downplay the “abduction” elements of Japan’s [state sponsored system of wartime sexual slavery](#), commonly known as the “comfort women.” In his lengthy article, Uesugi examines aspects of the [recent controversy over the Asahi newspaper’s coverage of the comfort women issue](#), as well as its August 2014 retractions of various articles it previously published. The former Asahi journalist, Uemura Takashi, who wrote those newspaper articles decades ago, has contributed [his story](#) to the Asia-Pacific Journal. We draw attention below to Uesugi’s emphasis on the contradictions in mediating “abduction” that are at play today, highlighting especially his attention to the legal definition of the crime of abduction. His essay in full in Japanese is linked at the end, as are materials on the issues from a 2007 press conference organized by the Center for Research and Documentation of which he is secretary general.*

Uesugi Satoshi, *The Comfort Women Issue as an ‘Abduction’ Incident*

Among the 17 people who are officially

recognized by the Japanese government as victims of abduction to North Korea, six are recognized as “kidnapped by force” and six are considered “kidnapped by enticement.” The details of the others remain at bay.

In this regard, there are significant parallels with the so-called “comfort women” history. In both, abduction is the primary concern, with the distinction between “kidnapped by force” or “enticement” of secondary importance. In both, the victims were forcibly taken away and held against their will for long periods of time.

In the cases of unresolved abductees to North Korea, I can only pray that they are still alive. I sincerely hope that North Korea repents and returns the victims home to Japan without further delay.

At the same time, we must think yet again about the suffering of victims of those abducted as “comfort women” by Japanese state orders. Both abductees to North Korea and the “comfort women” were victims of the same crime: kidnapping by enticement or force and being transported to a foreign country. Governments must work together to resolve such issues. If one side denigrates the other by nit-picking issues solely of terminology, these issues cannot be resolved.

I have thought about these issues for decades now. I believe that if we begin with the understanding that the victims in each case share things in common we may achieve resolution.

The nature of the wartime comfort women history makes precision concerning the number of victims impossible. Although we will never know for certain, the best estimates suggest that in a quarter of the demonstrated cases the victimized women and girls were violently taken away from home. By contrast, the majority of the cases involved being lured away by deceptive means.

From a legal perspective —based on Japan’s Penal Codes which went into effect in 1908 —being taken away “against one’s will” and being taken away by “deception” both fell under the category of forcible removal.

The key difference rests of course on how the victim was taken away: by violence or by words. “Deception” conceals the fact that the victim is taken somewhere against his or her will. Only after he or she is taken away and detained and grasps what has happened, does the victim realize that he or she has been taken away against his or her will.

In instances in the Philippines, it has been demonstrated that nearly all the women and girls involved were violently taken away, while in other cases and in other countries in the Japanese empire or under military occupation victims were more often removed by deceptive means. In other words, those violently removed often were in places engaged in battle. Those removed by other means, however, often were in places such as Korea and Taiwan not directly engaged in battle, meaning that in many such cases civilian bureaucrats working at a sub-section of the Japanese military’s Logistics Section —which established and managed the “Comfort Women” system —hired locals to recruit the victims by deceptive means.

The 1908 Penal Code of Japan separately named deception as “kidnapping by enticement” and forcible removal as “kidnapping by force;” the crimes, however, were punished with equal severity. When a person assaulted another and caused injury,

the offender was dealt with by the punishment prescribed for the crimes of the injury. When a person forcibly removed another person by pulling at the victim’s arm, for example, the person was punished in the same manner as someone who “kidnaps by enticement.” The victims in both were taken against their will, which is the most important component of dignity.

**Uesugi Satoshi** is a founding member of the [Center for Research and Documentation on Japan’s War Responsibility](#). He is currently Secretary General.

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Uesugi’s [full essay in Japanese](#)

Uesugi et al. [2007 Press Conference](#)

*Recommended citation, Uesugi Satoshi with an introduction by Alexis Dudden, “Contradictory Understandings of ‘Abduction’: Reflections on two Controversies,” The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 13, Issue. 17, No. 1, April 27, 2015.*

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