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# "Book Burning" in Japan

**Frank Baldwin**


## Abstract

This essay describes a campaign by nationalist Japanese journalist Komori Yoshihisa against a public symposium and workshop on historical memory and reconciliation in East Asia held at George Washington University in 2003. When conservative politicians, led from behind the scenes by current prime minister Abe Shinzo, alleged anti-Japan bias in the Diet (parliament), the cosponsor and funder of the workshop, the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, wilted under intense political pressure from the Right and withdrew support for the book project. A counterprotest in defense of academic freedom by senior American Japan specialists revived the workshop only to have the Foreign Ministry intervene. Funder interference—insistence on progovernment authors—undermined the project and the essay collection based on conference papers was never published. Fear of the Right led American and Japanese professors to reject a highly qualified fellowship applicant in 2015 and still haunts prominent bilateral intellectual exchange competitions. This essay's scrutiny of the Komori Affair leads to other contemporary concerns, such as the integrity of peer review in a context of funder intervention and the compromise of US academic partners dependent on intellectual exchange activities bankrolled by foreign governments.


On February 12, 2003, Komori Yoshihisa, Washington correspondent for the conservative *Sankei Shimbun*, attacked a public symposium and workshop at George Washington University on historical memory and reconciliation in East Asia as biased and anti-Japan. The articles triggered a right-wing protest and intervention by the future prime minister of Japan, Abe Shinzo, intimidated the funder, and curtailed academic freedom. The planned essay collection based on conference papers was never published and fear of nationalistic retaliation corrupted a major fellowship program for US and Japanese researchers.



**Fareed Zakaria in a 2006 interview with Komori Yoshihisa**

The conference was cosponsored by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) (New York) and the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP) (Tokyo), which funded the project, and an outgrowth of the Abe Fellowship Program. Convened by Mike Mochizuki of George Washington University



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and Charles Burress of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, its purpose was to produce an essay collection.[1]

In a front-page article in the *Sankei Shimbun*, a national newspaper with a circulation of 1 million, Komori charged that conference organizers were biased against Japan's post–World War II record and had failed to invite conservative scholars and a government representative to present Japan's official position. The headline suggested betrayal of Japan from within its own government: "Foreign Ministry Agency Sponsors Anti-Japan Seminars in the United States: Chinese and Korean Scholars Criticize Japan's Stance on War Issues."[2]

According to Komori, the Japan Foundation had launched a series of seminars in Washington to "censure Japan" because the country had not "adequately apologized or paid compensation for World War II." Speakers at the symposium criticized "Japan's handling of war issues as unethical and shameless," he wrote, and the Japanese participants—Akiko Hashimoto, Fujiwara Kiichi, and Tokudome Kinue—were all critics of official policy. In a deft bit of red-baiting, Komori said Fujiwara's criticism of the prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, a controversial Shinto shrine to Japan's war dead, appeared regularly in *Akahata*, the Communist Party newspaper, implying that Fujiwara wrote for the paper and was a communist sympathizer. (Both charges were untrue.) Komori simplified and distorted conference presentations beyond recognition, falsely claiming that Japan's wartime actions were equated with the Holocaust. The condemnation of Japan went unchallenged, he said, because no one represented the Japanese government and "majority opinion in Japan."[3] A second meeting of the seminar was scheduled for Japan in December 2003, Komori continued.

Although an American organization, the SSRC, of which I was Japan representative, ostensibly cosponsored the seminar, overall responsibility rested with the Japan Foundation. Komori quoted an anonymous CGP official: "The selection of seminar participants is up to the Social Science Research Council. We have no say."[4]

In a Viewpoint editorial on page two of the same issue of *Sankei Shimbun*, Komori, as the paper's editor- at-large, denounced the two-day closed workshop, repeating his claim that the American organizers assumed Japan had neither apologized for wartime excesses nor been reconciled with the rest of Asia. South Korean and Chinese scholars echoed Seoul's position on the "comfort women" issue and Beijing's on Japan's unrepentance. "How strange," Komori concluded, "that an international seminar so one-sided in its condemnation of the Japanese government and people should be sponsored and funded by an agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."[5]

In fact, Komori was a full-fledged participant in the symposium and workshop, invited because of his well-known conservative views on historical issues and Chinese antagonism toward Japan. Although a private citizen, he was a forceful, articulate supporter of the official position that the 1951 peace treaty closed the book on compensation. The Japanese embassy was invited to send a speaker to the workshop but declined, a failure diligently covered up by the Foreign Ministry. Komori asserted, again falsely, that a majority of the participants were Koreans and Chinese hostile to Japan, a charge certain to draw an emotional reaction from his Japanese readers. In fact, only five of the twenty-two attendees at the workshop were ethnic Koreans or Chinese. Komori was in the room for two days and knew the numbers. A closed workshop ideally is a safe place for candid discussion of sensitive topics, for free-wheeling comments that may in the heat of the moment stray from careful analysis to over-the-top assertions. People are



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free to change their minds—disavow their own positions in the light of evidence— confident that the exchanges are private. Like all participants, Komori agreed to confidentiality rules: deliberations were off the record, and participants could not report or write about the workshop for an outside audience.

On the Right in Japan, it is an article of faith that all issues from World War II were settled by the 1951 peace treaty and the Foreign Ministry is suspected of accommodationist tendencies. Komori broke the confidentiality agreement to strike at the ministry—to head off any backsliding ("weak-kneed diplomacy"). His audience was comprised of populist nationalists, particularly Abe's closest supporters in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

## A Partnership Is Born

Dependent on the United States for security, and seeing postwar goodwill erode under bitter criticism of Tokyo's huge bilateral trade surpluses and influence-peddling by the Japan lobby, the Foreign Ministry established the Center for Global Partnership (Nichi-Bei Sentā) in 1991 with an endowment of 50 billion yen, within the Japan Foundation, its soft-power arm.

The CGP's mission was to improve relations with American civil society, from grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to universities.[6] American advisers called for an independent organization, truly separate from the government. In a compromise, the ministry reluctantly agreed to let the CGP function at arm's length from official policy to mute suspicion that it was an offshoot of Japan Inc. It looked around for a reputable partner, a guarantor of the center's bona fides. The CGP's nascent portfolio included a plan to link Japanese and American social scientists in collaborative policy-related research.

As America's oldest academy of social science researchers, the SSRC fit the bill, and when the American Council of Learned Societies agreed to cooperate, Japan had two big names for the price of one. An independent NGO formed in 1923, the SSRC was nonpartisan (liberal but not left-wing), with an illustrious list of grantees and supporters. It encouraged research on contemporary social issues and was plugged into academia and the foundation world. Just what the doctor ordered.

And the SSRC was eager. In the early decades it was mainly funded by large foundations—Russell Sage, Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller. From 1972 the SSRC, together with ACLS, managed the Ford Foundation's famous Foreign Area Fellowship Program that shaped area studies. By 1991 those lucrative multiyear grants, with their generous overhead rates for administrative costs, were drying up. Ford was tired of area studies— faulted for a lack of disciplinary rigor—and signaled an end to funding. (In 1996, ten joint committees, including one on Japan, were phased out). With only a small endowment, the outlook for the SSRC was precarious: living hand to mouth on short-term staff-intensive contracts. A stable anchor grant with a high overhead rate was a godsend.

The SSRC agreed to work with a Japanese government agency on condition that there were no strings on the money. Mary McDonnell designed a research fellowship competition for midcareer American and Japanese scholars and other professionals.[7] Named after Abe Shintaro, a former foreign minister and father of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, the new fellowship was an innovative American-style program with safeguards against meddling. The keystone was an independent selection committee named by the SSRC to choose awardees by peer review.

Peer review may not be pretty—it is often compared to making sausage—but, like messy democracy, it is better than the alternatives.



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And it was the SSRC process that protected the new fellowship from the appearance and the reality of Japanese government interference. With this safeguard and other provisions embedded in the Basic Agreement between the CGP and the SSRC, the program was launched in 1991.

Applications poured in from the Japan field.

In the first decade the SSRC formed a good working relationship with the center around the fellowship and a joint seminar series. Honma Nagayo, the doyen of American studies in Japan and the CGP's second executive director, believed in the center's ideals. A funder of international exchange must not be "an implementing agency for government policy . . . [and] must allow institutions and individuals who receive support to conduct academic or cultural activities freely." The center's strengths, he thought, were an endowment—freedom from annual appropriations and political meddling—and a strong outside advisory committee.[8]

The SSRC's role was to organize conferences that brought Japanese and American fellows together around important topics. In six years the SSRC held four full-fledged joint seminars, a total of thirteen workshops that resulted first in pamphlet-style reports and then in essay collections on aging, energy, and Asian regionalization. SSRC put the Abe program on the map, and the fellowship, with its handsome stipend and flexible arrangements, became a respected part of the landscape, a coveted award for scholars writing on Japan.

## Fallout

Komori ended the Golden Age. The backlash hit the CGP like a tsunami. Bewildered young CGP staffers, unfamiliar with the GWU seminar, were besieged by angry true believers protesting the use of public money for an unpatriotic activity.

Within hours rattled CGP officials relented. Rather than challenge the accuracy of the *Sankei* articles or defend their mandate to host dialogues between Americans and Japanese on contemporary issues, the center's leaders decided to appease the Right by agreeing with Komori that the project was "unbalanced" and promising to correct the error. Academic freedom was a hit-and-run victim. Later in the day the Cabinet spokesman, following a script prepared by the Foreign Ministry, disavowed the project. That left Mochizuki, Burress, and me, the responsible SSRC program officer, twisting in the wind, and the book in jeopardy.

Komori was only getting started. He had planted a bee in Abe Shinzo's bonnet that conservative academics had been rejected for fellowships in favor of liberals. Abe, then a senior figure in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and since 2012 prime minister of Japan, threatened to terminate the fellowship and demanded confidential applicant records. The SSRC turned the information over to the CGP and Executive Director Taida Hideya delivered it to Abe on February 20, 2003, a sad day in the history of US-Japan intellectual exchange.[9]

LDP politicians threatened Japan Foundation president Fujii Hiroaki and Taida with dismissal and funding cuts. The administrators accepted Komori's version of events—the GWU workshop was slanted against Japan—and agreed that a second Memory conference would include authors acceptable to the government.[10] CGP staff members were overwhelmed. Pressed into duty as flak catchers, in the first two weeks they answered more than seven hundred telephone calls and emails (this was before social media in Japan) from Komori's army and the nationalist Right. Each inquirer had to be called, rather than sent an explanation, to avoid a paper trail. Program officers were run ragged preparing reports and materials about the workshop for the Foreign Ministry and LDP



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politicians, as well as by the conservative media hot on the story. Week after week they worked late into the night, sometimes all night. Meanwhile, credible rumors circulated that the center might be closed. The Komori attack was a demoralizing and exhausting experience, the worst crisis the Japan Foundation had ever faced, according to President Fujii.[11] To make matters worse, in a panicked move indicative of the anxiety gripping the foundation, Fujii cancelled a public lecture by an Abe fellow on postal reform, a pet project of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, fearing the nationalist media would report the talk as critical of the premier. Academic freedom was curtailed through self-censorship.[12]

Abe engineered the coup de grace in the Upper House of the Diet (parliament) through a surrogate, Tanigawa Shūzen, a two-term LDP Diet member, who summoned Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko to testify about the "anti-Japan" conference. To get the ministry off the hook, Kawaguchi promised, amid catcalls and jeers, that a second Memory conference, if held, would be "balanced" (meaning that it would reflect government policy). Komori and *Sankei* crowed over their vindication.[13]

## The Reckoning

In this climate of fear, Fujii put Chano Junichi, a rising star and director of the CGP's first division, in charge of damage control. Chano adopted a two-pronged strategy: refashion the fellowship program and avoid a second workshop and essay collection.

The SSRC recognized that the CGP had to demonstrate ownership of its own program and was ready to make reasonable alterations in the Basic Agreement, but not to strip away safeguards against funder interference. In June 2003, Chano demanded that the SSRC agree to revision of the Basic Agreement, and withheld funds to get his way. He had informally okayed the program and seminar budget for 2004 (the Japanese fiscal year begins April 1) but refused to transfer the money. We had signed a contract for a fellows' retreat in Florida and were arranging a workshop on consumer culture in Tokyo. The SSRC finance office was antsy. My instructions were to find out what Chano wanted and push on the budgets.[14]

Chano took off the gloves when he finally met with me on July 30, five months into the fiscal year. Until a new Basic Agreement was signed, he said, the CGP would pay the fellows' awards but not SSRC overhead costs or for the seminar series. "You will provide money for the grantees but not for the salaries of SSRC staff who send the checks?" I asked sardonically. Chano nodded "Yes." Here it was, the hard reality of Japanese soft power, the other side of haiku contests for school kids in Wisconsin and manga festivals for undergraduates in California. I pointed out that such an arrangement was not feasible: No pay, no work.

SSRC staff will leave, I said, we would have to find other jobs. I was freestyling, making up scenarios on the spot. The impasse ended with a tacit agreement that program funds would soon be provided.

The SSRC agreed to cosmetic changes and dodged an unworkable demand that the contract period be reduced to one year. The heart of the matter was awarding authority. Current practice was that the committee chose the awardees and within an hour SSRC staff started to notify them. Chano wanted the Japan Foundation to have final approval, with a weeklong delay so the names could be circulated to the Foreign Ministry and shown to interested parties such as Abe Shinzo, after which the foundation would authorize the SSRC to contact the awardees. A nominal change, Chano said, just for the sake of appearances. Afraid the SSRC board would reject the shift, Chano and McDonnell used wording in the Basic Agreement to connote approval without



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the Japan Foundation having the authority to reject: "The CGP Executive Director will inform the President of the Japan Foundation, who will acknowledge the selection of the Fellow within seven days."[15]

In summary, from 1991 to 2004 an independent committee of American and Japanese faculty members appointed by the SSRC had selected fellows by peer review. From this point, the CGP had final authority and could, acting on behalf of the Japan Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, overrule the committee and reject its choices. Committee members were not told of this confidential deal, a sword of Damocles hanging over the program. The SSRC could not get Chano to explicitly recognize that rejecting a committee choice would end the program. Doubting the accord would hold, I signaled my intention to leave if an award were overturned, blowing the whistle on the way out, and began to make exit plans. Fortunately, this modus vivendi—a form of mutually assured destruction—held for ten years in part because there were few controversial research proposals but also because the Japanese government feared the committee's reaction.[16]

## Memory Two

Mochizuki and Burress fought back against Komori's attack, despite the repeated objections of the Japan Foundation, which dared not challenge the journalist or antagonize the LDP and the Right. They got *Sankei Shimbun* to publish their version of the events and forced Komori to withdraw from a second workshop.[17] Mochizuki then convinced the CGP advisory committee, usually a tame sounding board, that a second workshop should be held in the interests of academic freedom. Ogoura Kazuo, the new foundation president, stalled until October 2004 and then withdrew support for a second conference. Mochizuki sought alternative funding and quietly rallied Japan specialists, including Ezra Vogel, T. J. Pempel, Ellis Krauss and Richard J. Samuels, to reverse the decision.[18] They saw the issue as academic freedom, a surrender to the Japanese Right, and warned the foundation that termination would alienate the field of Japanese studies, its prime constituency in the United States. Vogel appealed to senior Japanese politicians and hinted at resigning from the CGP's advisory committee, a public act fraught with negative publicity. Pempel refused to cooperate with the CGP, and Samuels presented a paper on academic freedom to Abe fellows at a program retreat.[19] In January 2005, Ogoura reversed himself and allowed planning for a workshop to resume.

Negotiations resumed between Chano and Mochizuki and Burress for a writers' conference with conservative authors. Chano's plan was to string out the discussion until the organizers and original participants gave up, and he raised foot-dragging to an Olympic sport. In August 2005, the Foreign Ministry blocked the project on the pretext that a paper on Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine might disrupt relations with China. Mochizuki and Burress doggedly persisted for a year, convinced that academic freedom was at stake and that it was in Japan's interest not to allow nationalists to thwart a scholarly meeting. Assured that reliably progovernment voices would be there, Shinzo Abe gave the green light.

The second workshop was held furtively in December 2006 on Awaji Island, Hyogo Prefecture, a conference center far from Tokyo and inconvenient to the ultranationalist sound trucks that troll urban streets, covered in patriotic slogans and blaring martial music through loudspeakers. Three of the original authors dropped out for personal reasons. Four of the seventeen presenters were conservative newbies chosen as protective coloring, including a former ambassador cum amateur



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diplomatic historian and two professors connected to the Foreign Ministry, chosen as discussants for name value. The conservative authors were living proof to Abe and the Right that the conference was "balanced" and progovernment positions would be expounded. Hired guns not committed to a serious venture, their papers were unusable and the Memory manuscript was never published. CGP outdid Captain John Beatty of *Fahrenheit 451*, "burning" a book before it was printed.

"After the *Sankei* attack and the political controversy that ensued, the CGP and the Japan Foundation became terrified about the possibility of similar criticism by nationalistic journalists in the future," Mike Mochizuki said. "They feared another media attack and political onslaught might destroy both."

The second workshop turned out to be a Potemkin village. Performance art was not cheap: at $62,968, it cost almost three times as much as the workshop at George Washington University. Altogether, the saga of Memory Two stretched over eight years, cost Japanese taxpayers several hundred thousand dollars, and left the organizers exhausted and disheartened. To the victor went the spoils: Chano Junichi was promoted to head the Japan Foundation's intellectual exchange department. The ethical strain on the Abe fellowship program surfaced years later.

## Kantei

Japanese voters, weary of the staggering casualties and economic dislocation caused by the earthquake, tsunami, nuclear power plant meltdown at Fukushima in 2011 and the inept recovery efforts of the Democratic Party, gave the Liberal Democratic Party a huge electoral victory in December 2012. Abe Shinzo became prime minister for a second time, now determined to consolidate power and stay in office. His first stint (2006–7) had ended quickly and badly, cut short by incompetence and scandal. His ambitious economic and political agenda included a national secrets law and revision of the 1947 "Peace" constitution. Building on earlier changes that expanded executive authority, Abe centralized power in the Prime Minister's Office (Kantei). He and Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide disrupted personnel administration by usurping the power to make appointments and were able to intimidate powerful ministries and "subordinate the bureaucracy to the Kantei."[20] The Foreign Ministry, once the preserve of a proud elite, fell into line. Threats to freedom of expression used to come from ultranationalist thugs; now intimidation came from within the Abe administration.[21]

An administration crackdown on the media intensified in early 2015. Independent comment—disagreement with the official line—brought swift reprisals as the Kantei sought to tame the media through "aggressive complaints to the bosses of critical journalists [and] blatant retaliation against outlets that persist in faulting the administration."[22] Bland, uncritical reporting spread; NHK, the national public broadcast network, acted like Abe's public relations shop.[23] In February 2016, Takaichi Sanae, minister of internal affairs and communications, threatened to revoke the licenses of television companies for "biased reporting," by which she meant "critical or negative coverage of the Abe administration."[24]

The Prime Minister's Office went way beyond comedian George Carlin's famous list of seven forbidden words, creating a catalog of indecent topics. The censors' bêtes noires include references to comfort women (sex slaves), wartime forced laborers, compensation litigation, the "peace" Constitution, reconciliation, right- wing revisionism, the South China Sea, territorial disputes, and World War II atrocities and violence. Kantei watchdogs growl at these subjects and get on the phone to editors and television executives



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or operate semicovertly through a host of bureaucratic informers and enforcers. In the Internet era, US academia is not beyond the reach of Abe's zealous praetorian guard.

## Capitol Hill Symposium

Chano Junichi became CGP executive director in May 2014, the first government official to head the center. In keeping with its autonomy and unique status, the first four directors had been outsiders: a journalist, an educator, and two retired business executives. They were followed by a former Foreign Ministry official and a retired journalist.[25] Chano's appointment ended the semblance of independence. As a veteran of the Komori Affair, he knew that safety lay in anticipating and avoiding problems that might be picked up by the nationalist press and invoke the wrath of Kantei media watchers. A hot potato soon landed in his lap.

The CGP funds the U.S.-Japan Network for the Future at the Mansfield Foundation, a two-year program established in 2009 to involve junior and midcareer researchers in bilateral policy issues.[26] The foundation planned a joint public symposium with the CGP on Capitol Hill on June 6, 2014, to showcase scholars from the second cohort. Complimentary copies of a publication of their essays, *Challenges Facing Japan: Perspectives from the U.S.-Japan Network for the Future*, would be distributed. With a distinguished keynote speaker and moderators, media coverage was expected, especially from Japan.[27]

Some of the speakers and several of the essays, or policy briefs, were potential trouble. The article by Celeste Arrington described lawsuits to "hold Japan accountable for alleged atrocities" committed during the colonial period (1910–45) and credited the cooperation of Japanese lawyers who filed suits in Japanese courts in support of Korean claimants. Although even-handed and scholarly, the piece was offensive to the Abe administration on three counts: (1) the topic itself was off-limits because Japan maintains that all outstanding issues from World War II and the colonial era were resolved by the 1951 peace treaty and the 1965 Japan–Republic of Korea normalization treaty; (2) analysis of the comfort women redress movement, including mention of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's use of the term *sex slaves*, and (3) a policy recommendation that the US government "urge the Japanese government to incontrovertibly acknowledge and repudiate past violence."[28]

When the CGP belatedly learned details of the symposium, alarm bells went off in Tokyo. Fearful of an attack by *Sankei* or other right-wing media, the Japan Foundation reported the danger to the Foreign Ministry, Kantei, and Prime Minister Abe. Chano rushed to Washington and urged Mansfield Foundation president Frank Jannuzi to tamp down the event. The program was an important piece in the Mansfield portfolio worth $150,825 in 2014 and $246,867 in 2013.[29] After a history lesson on the Komori Affair, Jannuzi reportedly told participants and the academic advisory committee that some symposium themes were sensitive and that the CGP and the foundation might be criticized in Japan. The *Challenges* booklet, carrying the CGP logo and a brief description of its activities, was a quandary of censorship and academic freedom.[30]

Arrington was told the night before the symposium at a reception at the Japanese Embassy that the CGP was disassociating itself, "withdrawing due to sensitivities," from the event. Center officials sought her "understanding," part of an intensive effort to recast the public event in a positive light. Leonard Schoppa, an advisory committee member, encouraged Arrington not to change her prepared remarks. Panelists discussed the issue among themselves to figure out what to say. They did not think their papers were controversial and wondered, "What's the big



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deal?"[31]

The Mansfield Foundation scrubbed the symposium clean, starting with its website announcement. Banners and flyers at the site bore only the foundation's name, *Challenges* was not distributed, and senior speakers said nothing about CGP sponsorship. Did the last-minute makeover and the Japanese journalists in the audience have a chilling effect on the presentations? Not on her comments, Arrington thinks, because they were "focused on positive developments at the people-to-people levels."[32] Whether because of the absence of fireworks or the omission of the CGP's name, the symposium attracted no press or social media coverage in the United States or Japan. Crisis management won a partial, short-lived victory.

The Mansfield Foundation released *Challenges* as an online publication six weeks later without mention of CGP sponsorship, an example of academic misconduct to advocates of transparency in funding. The Japan Foundation connection has been omitted from subsequent Network publications, too, while, in stark contrast, collaboration with the Korea Foundation is celebrated.[33] Despite CGP wishes, the panelists' papers were not changed. By the delayed publication date, July 23, 2014, *Challenges* was old news, yet out there on the Internet forever.

## Blackballed

Abe fellowship selection meetings settle down slowly. Many committee members have not seen each other in a year and there is much to catch up on—promotions, forthcoming books, divorces. There is an air of anticipation, tinged with a frisson of concern by new people. No one wants to be the outlier, too hard or too soft a grader. They all have read a share of the applications weeks before and sent their evaluations to the SSRC staff, who collated the results into ranking and rating sheets now on the table before them. Mary McDonnell reminds everyone of the guidelines. They will consider many factors in reaching their decisions, she says, but foremost is merit, the quality of an application. The committee listens attentively, needing a refresher course on procedures yet anxious to dig into the evaluations and get started. Two days of intense discussion—argument and trade-offs—lie ahead.[34]

The meeting on November 7, 2015, was different. Among the applicants was Celeste Arrington. Her project, "Lawyers and Litigation in Japanese and Korean Politics," fell under the fourth Abe program theme of governance, empowerment, and participation. She proposed to examine "the changing role of the law and courts in Japanese and South Korean politics by focusing on how lawyers and litigation affect policymaking," a study that would contribute to the growing literature on the judicialization of politics by exploring "legal mobilization in Japan and Korea." Her rich methodology combined "interviews, network analysis, content analysis of court rulings and media coverage and process tracing in paired case studies" in Japan and Korea focused on "policies related to persons with disabilities and crime victims." Arrington was qualified in Japanese and Korean and had already done two weeks of fieldwork in South Korea in May 2015.[35] It was an extraordinary application, and Arrington was rated the consensus best candidate that year. The half-dozen highest rated applicants invariably survive the one-by-one review. She was No. 1, a shoo-in, better than a bet on Tom Brady in the Super Bowl.

But Arrington had been the subject of intense discussion between the SSRC and CGP for weeks.[36] In early October, Chano recounted to McDonnell his extraordinary precautions at the symposium in Washington because Arrington's policy brief was not "balanced." If she were selected for an Abe fellowship, *Sankei Shimbun*



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might attack the Japan Foundation, putting the program at risk. As a survivor of the Komori Incident, McDonnell knew the history, but her dilemma was that if the Japanese government interfered, the president of the SSRC would hit the roof. She thought the best outcome was for the committee on some pretext—the topic was lame, Arrington had a poor track record, the project would not significantly advance knowledge of the topic—to deny Arrington a fellowship.

After the usual instructions, McDonnell brought up the Arrington application and gave the floor to Chano. Over the years CGP officials had occasionally spoken to the committee on the second day of the meeting, after the selection of awardees was completed, but never about a particular applicant before the group deliberated. Chano, however, told the panel that Arrington had made policy recommendations in her Mansfield paper that could have resulted in a second *Sankei* incident. A CGP aide distributed background materials to the committee, including copies of Arrington's paper with a sentence highlighted.[37] If the committee picked Arrington, Chano concluded, the Japan Foundation would have to overrule their decision, which they did not want to do.

In other words, the Foundation could reject the committee's choice, but the formal procedure, if it became public knowledge, would be extremely embarrassing and might trigger a repeat of the protest by Japan specialists in 2004–5. To avoid an official intervention (and a paper trail), please do our dirty work for us and rid the Japan Foundation of this troublesome applicant.

Chair Barbara Stallings, who participated in the confidential negotiations that preceded the meeting, and McDonnell led the discussion, commending Chano's protection of the program in the past, especially after the Komori Affair. The flummoxed committee members, some of whom apparently had been contacted beforehand, had to choose between their ethical responsibility to judge applications fairly and Chano's "request" that they exclude a qualified researcher whose article would discomfit CGP in its relationship with the Prime Minister's Office. Two members thought the application had been too politicized by the discussion to consider fairly. McDonnell suggested screening out Arrington.

Taking their cue from the SSRC, the committee members removed Arrington's application from consideration. She got the standard rejection letter, unaware that collusion between the funder and the SSRC had knocked her out of the running.[38] Arrington's research and publication plans were disrupted, and she scrambled for funding, a perilous situation for a young scholar working toward tenure. Meanwhile, Chano had resolved another crisis for the Japan Foundation, and McDonnell had saved a grant for the SSRC and avoided revealing that the Japanese government had overturned a fellowship committee decision.[39]

To be clear, Arrington's project itself was not controversial, was unrelated to the policy brief for the Mansfield symposium, and had none of the toxic words like *comfort women* that set hair on fire at the Prime Minister's Office. A fully qualified applicant with an unblemished project was rejected at the request of the Japanese government, a decision condoned by the Social Science Research Council because a short paper in an online publication might be dredged up by conservative media.

## Full Circle

In 1991, the SSRC guaranteed that a fellowship offered by the fledgling Center for Global Partnership was independent of the Japanese government, and the CGP proclaimed the Abe its flagship program. Untainted by the notorious influence-peddling of the Japan lobby



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in the 1980s, the center and its grant programs converted skeptics in academia and the media into applicants and Abe fellows. Japanese politicians and nationalist issues occasionally influenced program activities, but the safeguard of academic integrity— independent peer review—protected the competition. The Japan Foundation got what it wanted: credibility. From 1991 through 2014, the program made 349 awards. And the SSRC got what it needed: a stable funder. In 2015, the SSRC received $1,597,722 from the CGP, the third-largest grant that year (after the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York).[40]

Funders are stakeholders. It is their money, and they can specify how it is spent: the objectives, scale, and duration of a program. They sometimes meddle around the edges. What they cannot do is muscle into a selection meeting and blackball an individual whose publications are inconvenient. Intermediaries such as university administrators or SSRC staff must be willing and able to enforce boundaries, to tell funders, "No, you can't do that." One hopes the Abe fellowship is the outlier among the twenty-seven fellowships and prizes the SSRC oversees.

At first glance, interference with peer review of applications for research funding does not seem to be a widespread problem in US academia. In 2018, neither the *Chronicle of Higher Education* nor *Inside Higher Education* carried an article on the topic, a puzzling dearth at a time when colleges are reportedly "under fire from an array of forces on the right."[41] How common is tampering and how often is it covered up?

Many forms of assessment have been challenged in the past year, such as who gets admitted to Harvard, the appointment of a former Trump administration official to the University of Virginia's Miller Center, and, of course, student evaluations of professors. My hunch, based on a cursory review of the literature, is that the vast enterprise of encouraging meritocracy, from the national selection of Fulbright grantees overseen by the International Institute of Education and the layered choice of Mellon fellows to the hundreds of ad hoc committees on campuses across the land, is functioning well. (Not so its sibling, peer review in publishing, a process whose shortcomings are abundantly proclaimed.)

That is not to turn a blind eye to the well-documented fetid relationships between universities and donors. The George Mason University–Charles Koch Foundation fiasco heads the list of recent causes célèbres.[42] Koch money, an estimated $50 million to George Mason, came with contractual controls and bought influence over hiring, curriculum, and graduate fellowships, influencing dissertation topics and awardees at some universities. At Florida State University, for example, the foundation had "excessive influence over the selection, retention, and research topics of graduate fellows," and applicants for Koch fellowships were screened by a donor advisory board.[43]

In 2015, the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II, Japan announced a $500 million increase in public diplomacy spending. Losing an image battle with China and the Republic of Korea, for example, in the proliferation of public events and commemorative statues for comfort women in the United States, the Abe administration "sought to amplify Japan's voice in global discussions."[44] The Foreign Ministry earmarked $15 million to support Japanese studies at nine US universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Georgetown University (but notably not including George Washington University). The money reportedly will fund courses, student exchanges, and endowed chairs. Prime Minister Abe talked up the donations during visits to Harvard, MIT,



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and Stanford in May 2015. Rather than the Koch Foundation's flagrant, messianic manipulation, the risk to universities taking Abe's money is faculty self-censorship.

Originally the firewall between the Japanese government and applicants, the SSRC became a Trojan horse letting the enemies of academic freedom into the inner sanctum of confidential selection. The SSRC broke its obligation and gave the Japan Foundation veto power. Just as trust in particular roles like the academic "is a collective good," ethical lapses by program officers are a social loss.[45] The CGP crossed the line again in 2017, in collusion with SSRC staff, and interfered with the selection of applicants for the Abe Fellowship for Journalists to smother articles before they were written. *New York Times* columnist David Brooks has observed, "When you degrade norms, when you degrade standards, they tend to continue to degrade."[46] The unthinkable in 2015 had become routine two years later.

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# Notes

[1] The workshop, part of the Abe Fellowship Program CGP-SSRC Seminar Series, was titled "Memory, Reconciliation, and Security in the Asia-Pacific Region: Implications for Japan-U.S. Relations." It was held January 31–February 1, 2003. The symposium, convened on January 30, 2003, was sponsored by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, Elliot School of International Affairs, GWU.
[2] Komori Yoshihisa, "Gaimushō no kabukikan Bei de tai-Nichi kyūdan seminā, Chu-Kan no gakushara sengo taiō o hinan [Foreign Ministry Agency Sponsors Anti-Japan Seminars in United States: Chinese and Korean Scholars Criticize Japan's Stance on War Issues]," *Sankei Shimbun*, February 12, 2003.
[3] Komori, "Gaimushō no kabukikan Bei."
[4] Komori, "Gaimushō no kabukikan Bei."
[5] Komori Yoshihisa, "Kokusai Kōryū Kikan seminā [Japan Foundation Seminar]," *Sankei Shimbun*, February 12, 2003.
[6] David Featherman, "The Abe Fellowship Program: Investing in the Future of the Trans-Pacific Dialogue," *CGP Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1993), 1, 4–5.
[7] McDonnell was senior vice president for strategic learning and special initiatives at the SSRC. As founding director of the Abe Fellowship Program at SSRC, she oversaw it until June 2019.
[8] Honma Nagayo, "Newly Appointed Executive Director's Greeting," *CGP Newsletter* 7 (Winter 1995): 1, 8.
[9] Author, email message to Mary McDonnell, March 20, 2003.
[10] The Japan Foundation was dependent on annual appropriations. Income from the CGP's



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endowment, invested by law in Japanese government bonds, shrank by more than half after the speculative real estate and stock market bubble burst in 1992.

[11] Untitled report by the CGP to its Advisory Committee, title and front pages missing, Section 5, *"Sankei Shimbun" ni yoru 'Nihon kyūdan seminā hōdō ni tsuite no hōkoku* (Report on *Sankei Shimbun*'s coverage of the "Censure Japan Seminar"), June 23, 2003 and Mike Mochizuki, memorandum, "Controversy Triggered by Mr. Yoshihisa Komori's Articles in *Sankei Shimbun*," June 24, 2003.

[12] The lecture by Patricia Maclachlan of the University of Texas, Austin, was cancelled on February 28, 2003.

[13] The hearing was March 5, 2003.

[14] Mary McDonnell, email message to author, July 12, 2003.

[15] Carlton Vann, email message to author, October 7, 2004. Basic Agreement, Appendix 1, Section 2, "Selection Process," 4.

[16] In 2003 Japanese committee members faulted the CGP for not defending academic freedom in the Komori Affair. The following year Chano said they should choose awardees on merit regardless of the CGP's position on political issues.

[17] The Japan Foundation initially demanded that the organizers retain Komori: "Continuation of this project without Mr. Komori is unthinkable." Yoshizawa Yutaka, untitled memorandum, received by the SSRC March 28, 2003.

[18] From Harvard; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, San Diego; and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, respectively.

[19] Richard J. Samuels, "Academic Freedom and Public Funding," January 17, 2005, Abe Fellows Retreat, Amelia Island, Florida. Samuels noted three cases funded by the CGP that raised concern about academic freedom in "the American Japan studies community."

[20] Aurelia George Mulgan, *The Abe Administration and the Rise of the Prime Ministerial Executive* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 45.

[21] Interview with a former CGP official, April 2015.

[22] Martin Fackler, "Effort by Japan to Stifle News Media Is Working," *New York Times*, April 26, 2015, 1.

[23] Aurelia George Mulgan, "Shinzo Abe's 'Glass Jaw' and Media Muzzling in Japan," *Diplomat*, May 18, 2015, accessed February 15, 2019.

[24] Mulgan, *The Abe Administration*, 61; Fackler, "Effort by Japan to Stifle News Media."

[25] The executive directors, in order, were Kusuda Minoru, Homma Nagayo, Wakamoto Yoshihiko, Taida Hideya, Numata Sadaaki, and Nomura Akio. Numata suggested that the SSRC be a fig leaf for the CGP.

[26] Named after Mike Mansfield, former ambassador to Japan, the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation manages several intellectual exchanges with Japan.

[27] Mansfield Foundation, public symposium announcement, "Challenges Facing Japan: Perspectives from the U.S.- Japan Network for the Future," May 21, 2014.

[28] "Japan–South Korea Relations and Litigation," 11–20.

[29] Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, Financial Report, June 30, 2014.

[30] "Japan Moves Forward: Views from the U.S.-Japan Network for the Future," January 24, 2012.

[31] Celeste Arrington, telephone interview, February 19, 2019; Arrington, email message to



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author, February 21, 2019.
[32] Celeste Arrington, email message to author, February 27, 2019.
[33] See Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, "Navigating Uncertainties on the Korean Peninsula: In Search of a Roadmap," September 7, 2017. CGP participation is acknowledged in U.S.-Japan Network application announcements.
[34] I participated in nearly all committee meetings from 1996 to 2012.
[35] Celeste Arrington, Application, SSRC Abe Fellowship 2015.
[36] The committee members present were Chair Barbara Stallings, Brown University; Kanie Norichika, Keio University; Anil Deolalikar, University of California, Riverside; Edward J. Lincoln, George Washington University; Nakanishi Hiroshi, Kyoto University; and Shirahase Sawako, University of Tokyo. Stallings joined the committee in 2002, became chair in 2009, and served until 2017.
[37] The highlighted sentence is "Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, meanwhile, has done little since resuming the premiership in late 2012 to dispel perceptions that he is a right-wing revisionist."
[38] The letter reads in part: "Committee members were very impressed with the quality of this year's applicant pool. Unfortunately, we received far more applications than we can support. . . . we are unable to offer you a fellowship."
[39] Charles Burress foresaw the likelihood of long-term damage even if the Japan Foundation and the CGP "averted the immediate threat." Charles Burress, email message to author, February 27, 2003.
[40] Social Science Research Council, Financial Statement, June 30, 2016, 18–19.
[41] Steve Kolowich, "The American Campus under Siege," special report, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 9, 2018.
[42] Erica L. Green and Stephanie Saul, "What Charles Koch and Other Donors to George Mason University Got for Their Money," *New York Times*, May 5, 2018.
[43] UnKoch My Campus, *Violations of Academic Freedom, Faculty Governance, and Academic Integrity: An Analysis of the Charles Koch Foundation*, *June 2016 (republished December 2018),* 51–56.
[44] Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, "Japan's Cultural Diplomacy, with Warren Stanislaus," August 28, 2018.
[45] Lawrence Lessig, "How Academic Corruption Works," *Chronicle Review*, October 12, 2018.
[46] David Brooks, National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, February 15, 2019.



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