

## **Commentary**

# **GHOSTS OF THE PAST: THE JAPANESE HISTORY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY**

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This paper brings together three perspectives on the textbook controversy – Japanese, Chinese, and Korean. The first is particularly important because whilst the issue is commonly portrayed as a conflict between ‘Japan’ and its neighbours, in fact the Japanese themselves are deeply divided. In the present situation the publication of the *New History Textbook* represents a victory for the nationalist right, but this is counterbalanced by the overwhelming rejection by Japanese local education authorities and teachers. This schism is not confined to Japan; it also exists elsewhere, most noticeably in South Korea, where description of the Japanese colonial period raises awkward questions of collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

The textbook controversy is but one of a range of issues – comfort women, Unit 731 (biological warfare), reparations, government and imperial ‘apologies’, Yasukuni shrine visits, peace constitution and rearmament – that all form part of the unresolved heritage of Japanese colonialism. The Japanese assessment of its past is often contrasted with Germany’s. There are a number of crucial differences.<sup>2</sup> Whilst Germany did not capitulate until it had been overrun, Japan surrendered while it still had control of extensive areas of Asia. In some places, notably South Korea, this enabled collaborators to pass through into the new administration. The countries most affected by Japanese colonialism, China, Korea and to a lesser extent Vietnam, were divided and so Japan could to some degree play one off against the other. Even today, China and the two Koreas cannot coordinate their protests about the textbooks.<sup>3</sup> However, the crucial difference was that in the case of Germany the sins of the past were largely heaped on the Nazi party, by victors and vanquished alike. In the Pacific, the United States, conscious of the dangers of Communist-led or influenced independence movements, and of social upheaval in Japan, backed

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<sup>1</sup> Magnier, 26 August 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Hein and Selden (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Kim Hyung-jin, 14 April 2001; Shin, 9 April 2001.

down from the original intention to abolish the emperor system. Some generals were hanged but the Showa emperor was retained and harnessed to affect a remarkably successful occupation, and a client relationship that lasts to this day.

The textbook issue not merely binds Japan to its past, but also fashions its future in East Asia and the world. Japan can come to terms with the past and build an amicable relationship with its neighbours. This reconciliation with Asia could be termed a European Union approach – the binding together of old enemies to make another war between them unthinkable – and, in the Asian context, implies a distancing from the United States; not supporting, for instance, missile defence aimed primarily against China. The alternative is a hesitant commitment to Asia and a firmer allegiance to the United States, participation in missile defence, rearmament and engagement in a ‘war on terrorism’ which has yet undefined boundaries but assumes American hegemony (and could conceivably involve action against North Korea). Tension between these two broad policy alternatives is likely to dominate Japanese and Asia-Pacific politics for the foreseeable future. The textbook issue is a key indicator of the course of this struggle.

## **JAPAN’S LATEST HISTORY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY: EDUCATION AND NATIONAL CONSCIENCE**

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In the late 1980s and early 1990s, two factors – the history textbook controversy of 1982 and Saburo Ienaga’s (partial) victories in his third textbook lawsuit – brought changes in the content of Japanese history textbooks.<sup>5</sup> For one thing, the textbooks in those years came to include more references to the war atrocities Japan committed during the Asia-Pacific War. The most notable example was the inclusion of references to ‘comfort women,’ which appeared in some of the 1994-edition high school textbooks and in all of the 1997-edition junior high school textbooks.<sup>6</sup> The change in the history textbooks was substantial, and indicative of a changing public discourse on the war.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile Japanese right-wing nationalists also expanded its activities in the struggle over history textbooks in the late 1980s,<sup>8</sup> and the fluctuation of

<sup>4</sup> Yoshiko Nozaki thanks the National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship for awarding her a fellowship and Hiromitsu Inokuchi for research assistance.

<sup>5</sup> Nozaki and Inokuchi (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Nozaki (2001).

<sup>7</sup> To be sure, the progressive trend of textbooks in this period does not necessarily mean the same was true in education in general. For example, the Japanese Ministry of Education strongly pressed the local schools to implement other nationalistic policies in schools, including hoisting of flag *Hinomaru* and singing of song *Kimigayo* at school ceremonies that had been opposed by teachers for decades.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in 1986, a high school Japanese history textbook *Shinpen Nihonshi* edited by a right-wing group, the ‘Nihon o Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi’ (National Conference for

Japanese politics in the early 1990s afforded them an opportunity to consolidate their influence in the sphere of politics. In August 1993, the Liberal Democratic Party (hereafter LDP), Japan's ruling party since 1955, was ousted. Although the party returned to the power in the next year by forming a coalition government, it was during this period of being without power that some LDP members established the (LDP) Committee for the Examination of History. They agreed to launch a campaign promoting views of history that held the Asia-Pacific War to be justifiable, and that denied the existence of Nanjing Massacre and comfort women.<sup>9</sup>

In 1994-95, the LDP right-wing politicians (along with some members of other parties) worked hard to block a Diet resolution of apology that was to be issued at the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's surrender. Although they failed to block the resolution, they succeeded in removing from it key terms such as 'acts of aggression' and 'colonial rules'.<sup>10</sup> After the resolution, they began to focus on attacking the history textbooks. In particular, they repeatedly demanded that the Ministry of Education order the publishers to remove references to 'comfort women' from the textbooks.

Some new faces joined the right-wing cause and energized its activities by attracting media interest. One such face was Nobukatsu Fujioka, an education professor at the University of Tokyo. He converted from the left to the right after taking a year-long leave of study in the United States around the time of the Gulf War, and began to publish many articles criticizing history education in postwar Japan and current history textbooks.<sup>11</sup> In late 1996, he and others established the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho o Tsukurukai*, hereafter the JSHTR), declaring that they would publish 'a new history textbook' to be used in junior high schools in 2002.<sup>12</sup>

In June 1998, the Minister of Education, Nobutaka Machimura stated that history textbooks 'lacked a balance,' and that the Ministry was deliberating over ways to 'improve' the situation. In January 1999, the Ministry asked the publishers to make their textbook content more balanced and to reconsider their selection of authors. At that point, although a few publishers made minor textbook revisions and replaced some authors, overall, none of them made radical changes. The earlier drafts of the 2002-edition textbooks indicated that the publishers did not intend to alter significantly the contents related to the war.<sup>13</sup> However, in early 2000 when the final drafts were actually submitted to the Ministry's textbook screening, many

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Defending Japan), passed the government textbook screening and was published by Hara Shobo. The book was a milestone for the right because it was the first publication of their school textbook in postwar era. It was, however, a failure in a commercial sense because nationwide only a few schools adopted it. The publisher discontinued the publication in 1993. It was published again in 1995 under the new title *Saikin Nihonshi*.

<sup>9</sup> The members included those who later became prime ministers such as Ryutaro Hashimoto and Yoshiro Mori. The committee reached its conclusion and disbanded itself in February 1995. See also Nozaki, (2001:176-179).

<sup>10</sup> See note 26.

<sup>11</sup> See also McCormack (2000); Gerow (2000).

<sup>12</sup> A direct translation of the group's name is 'a group to develop a new history textbook.' For further discussion, see Tawara (1997: 6-148).

<sup>13</sup> Tawara (2000:37). See also Inokuchi and Nozaki, January 23, 2001.

descriptions concerning Japanese war atrocities were cut back or removed, the most shocking being the almost total erasure of ‘comfort women’ from the textbooks.<sup>14</sup> At this point, it was clear that the new textbooks as a whole would include fewer discussions of Japanese war atrocities.

Meanwhile a draft textbook authored by members of the JSHTTR was also submitted for textbook screening in September. As its content soon became public knowledge, more and more people, including many historians and history teachers, came to express their dismay and concern, not only because the manuscript was strongly chauvinistic but also because it contained many basic errors. The South Korean and Chinese governments expressed their concerns – and rightly so, since the Japanese government had continually promised them it would ensure the younger generation would be taught the truth about the war.

The right-wing forces were determined, however. When a member of the Ministry’s textbook examination council raised a serious question about the text and began to discuss its rejection, the Ministry transferred him to another section. When the LDP’s secretary general, Hiromu Nonaka, responded to the Chinese government, implying that the government would correct the text through the screening processes, LDP hawks and the JSHTTR members made him take back his words.<sup>15</sup>

In early 2001, after the authors had made 137 corrections, the Ministry of Education approved the text and declared that it would not request further revisions, and that the local education boards, not the Ministry, would be responsible for their textbook adoption. The Ministry’s neutrality was, of course, pretence, since its statement meant that the education boards could disregard teachers’ opinions about the textbooks (teachers had tended to prefer progressive textbooks). In fact, the right-wing forces had worked to exclude teachers from the textbook adoption processes, and some local education boards had already changed the procedure.

The situation was not great for those who opposed the adoption of the textbook now entitled *New History Textbook*. Concerned citizens and groups, exchanging information through the internet, organized study meetings and initiated local petitions. Many appeals – some reported by the media, others posted at web sites – were issued by different groups and individuals.<sup>16</sup> There were international efforts also, including the petition of 400,000 South Korean citizens to oppose the adoption of the text. Even so, it seemed the progressives were fighting an uphill battle.<sup>17</sup>

In mid-July and August, as the deadline for the education boards to make their final decisions neared, grassroots progressives strengthened their efforts. Among the public schools, the district of Shimotsuga in Tochigi

<sup>14</sup> Tawara (2000:37) reports that some publishers’ staff told him that the Prime Minister’s office pressured the publishers to ‘use discretion’ in dealing with the description of comfort women (though the publishers did not confirm this information).

<sup>15</sup> Tawara (2000:38-39).

<sup>16</sup> A number of web sites posted the appeals and protests. To name but a few: <<http://www.jca.apc.org/~itagaki/history/>>, <<http://www.h2.dion.ne.jp/~kyokasho/>>, <<http://www.ne.jp/asahi/kyokasho/net21/>>, and <<http://www.jca.apc.org/rekkyo/>>.

<sup>17</sup> ‘International Scholars’ Appeal Concerning the 2002-Edition Japanese History Textbooks’ was also inaugurated on 10 July 2001. See <<http://www.jca.apc.org/JWRC/center/english/>> and <<http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas/campaign/textbk1.htm>>.

Prefecture first decided to adopt the text; however, it reversed the decision after it received strong criticism from inside and outside the region. This, in retrospect, was the turning point. Those local education boards reportedly in favour of the text did not win enough votes to adopt it after all, except for a few cases in Tokyo and Ehime.<sup>18</sup> Thus the latest Japanese struggle over history textbooks ended with a victory for the progressives. The local, national, and international efforts effectively kept the right-wing text at bay. It needs to be recognized, however, that during the latest struggle over history textbooks, Japanese history textbooks as a whole took a step backward in presenting a truthful account of the Asia-Pacific War.<sup>19</sup>

## CHINESE CONCERNS

JIAN YANG

The first serious Japanese school history textbook controversy between China and Japan took place in 1982, when the Chinese government accused the Japanese Ministry of Education of falsifying the history of Japanese militarists' aggression against China by changing the word 'aggression' into 'advancement.' The second round of controversy occurred in 1986.<sup>20</sup> While the previous two controversies, especially the 1982 one, seriously strained Sino-Japanese relations, the latest controversy contributed to the 'toughest situation' since China and Japan normalised their diplomatic ties nearly 30 years ago.<sup>21</sup>

The Chinese accused the *New History Textbook* of portraying Japan's former imperialism and the aggressive war as a force to help free Asian countries from colonial rule. The state-run *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) noted that 'It [the textbook] shamelessly justifies Japan's invasion of Southeast Asia as "victories over the Western powers there allowed countries in the region to achieve postwar independence".'<sup>22</sup>

What angered the Chinese most is perhaps the description of the Nanjing Massacre. The draft of the textbook claimed that even if there had been some killings, they were not the same kind of thing as the holocaust.<sup>23</sup> The final version approved by the Ministry of Education refers to the

<sup>18</sup> The exceptions were the Tokyo Metropolitan Education Board, which selected the text for some of its Schools for Handicapped Children, and the Ehime Prefectural Education Board, which chose it for its Schools for Handicapped and Deaf Children. Because several private schools adopted the text, the market share of the *New History Textbook* will be approximately 0.04% (520-570 copies will be sold).

<sup>19</sup> For a good summary of the latest history textbook struggle, see Uesugi (2001).

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see Ijiri, (1990: 644-648). See also Whiting (1989: 46-60). Some Japanese scholars believe the issue was 'falsely reported' or 'exaggerated'. See Ijiri, (1990: 644). See also Okabe (1992: 230).

<sup>21</sup> Xinhua, 1 September 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, 24 March 2001.

<sup>23</sup> The draft textbook was not officially published, but its content became widely known. By including the phrase the authors minimised the massacre.

massacre; however, it also mentions it in the part about Far East International Tribunal in Tokyo and tries to obliterate it. According to the verdict of the Tribunal, the Japanese imperialist army killed more than 200,000 Chinese civilians in Nanjing. The revised textbook says 'To be sure, regarding the reality of the incident, points of doubt have been raised in terms of the data, and various views exist, so the controversy still continues today.'<sup>24</sup>

Japan's aggression and atrocities committed in China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continue to bedevil Sino-Japanese relations. The Chinese note that Japan has not adequately acknowledged and apologised for its aggression and atrocities. Although Japan expressed remorse and self-contemplation on a number of occasions and Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995 for the first time used the word 'apology' in his statement about Japanese aggression,<sup>25</sup> the efforts are offset by senior Japanese leaders' 'gaffes' about the past.<sup>26</sup> The Chinese tend to emphasise facts like the Japanese Diet's failure to pass a resolution apologising for Japan's wartime crimes.<sup>27</sup> They find that their dissatisfaction is further justified by the sharp contrast between Japan's attitude towards the past and that of Germany. The Chinese today remain acutely sensitive to any efforts which they believe attempt to deny, cover or beautify historical facts.

Closely related to the history issue is Chinese fear of Japanese nationalism, which once contributed to a militaristic Japan. Chinese analysts believe that nationalism has always been a rather strong undercurrent in Japan and this undercurrent started to re-emerge in the early 1980s. By the late 1980s, some Chinese analysts observed, past Japanese constitutional restraints on military activity had gradually become 'dead letters.'<sup>28</sup> This, they argued, was due to 'the nationalist ideological trend running wild.'<sup>29</sup> The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s and Japan's economic difficulties in recent years, as well as the rise of China, have further contributed to the growth of Japanese nationalism.<sup>30</sup>

It is sometimes argued that China has been using the history issue and war guilt to manipulate Japanese politics and foreign policies. While the argument cannot be dismissed, it should not be taken for granted either. Increasingly, China's criticism of Japan's attitude towards the past has as much, if not more, to do with China's domestic politics. In the latest textbook

<sup>24</sup> Nishio et.al. (2001: 295). The publisher decided to sell the textbook for the general public after it passed the screening. The citation here refers to the general public copy. The same textbook will be published for schools in 2002.

<sup>25</sup> In his statement, Murayama said that Japan 'through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope of that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology.'

<sup>26</sup> Green (2001: 95-96).

<sup>27</sup> In 1995, Murayama tried in vain to get a forthright apology from the Diet. Drafters of the resolution replaced the word 'apology' with '*hansei*' (remorse) and 'aggressive acts' with 'aggressive-like acts.' Legislators also ascribed the acts in question to all countries, not just Japan. Even so, only 230 members of the 511-seat chamber voted for the measure. In China, the resolution has done more harm than good. See Kristof (1998: 40).

<sup>28</sup> As cited in Pollack (1990: 720).

<sup>29</sup> Pollack, p. 720.

<sup>30</sup> Zhu (1999: 6-7). See also, Fan (2001)

controversy, the Chinese showed much admiration for South Korea's strong reactions. One commentator saluted the Koreans in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (China Youth Daily), saying that South Korea's anti-Japanese movement should be able to 'make the whole (Korean) nation proud' and 'should also be enough to make other Asian countries which suffered Japanese brutal invasions rethink their policies towards Japan.'<sup>31</sup>

A dilemma for the Chinese government is that a tough stance on the history issue, especially with regard to Japan's apology, may serve the government well domestically but could exacerbate Japan's intransigence and further strengthen Japanese nationalism. One Chinese analyst points out that Chinese leaders have actually changed their tone on the history issue in recent years. He observes that Chinese leaders in the past often used the phrase 'past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide for the future.' In recent years, however, they often use the phrase 'take history as a mirror and face up to the future.' The change, the analyst believes, 'embodies a more pragmatic attitude' of the Chinese government towards the history issue.<sup>32</sup> Arguably, Beijing wants to make sure that the history issue will not damage the overall bilateral relationship which is essential to China's economic development.

Indeed, despite its 'extreme regret', 'strong indignation' and the warning of a 'tough situation', China's reaction was more restrained than that of South Korea and economic relations have not been seriously affected. However, China's distrust of Japan is deep-rooted and, with Japanese politics moving towards right, the history issue is unlikely to be settled in the near future. The difficulty of walking out from the shadow of the past is well illustrated by Japan-South Korea relations, which experienced a rapid improvement after Kim Dae Jung's 1998 visit to Japan but then a free fall during the textbook controversy.

## KOREA'S REACTION

TIM BEAL

Korea's reaction to the current, and previous, textbook incidents is largely affected by the differing relationship the two Korean states have with Japan, and the current state of Inter-Korean relations. There have been occasions since the Pyongyang summit of June 2000 when there was an element of joint action. A meeting of historians in Pyongyang in December 2000<sup>33</sup> led to a joint exhibition there the following March.<sup>34</sup> There were reports that a committee had been set up to conduct 'joint action programs along with North Korean historians against Japan's expected authorization of a new history textbook, containing lots of distorted facts about its colonial past'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chen (2001).

<sup>32</sup> Zhang (2001).

<sup>33</sup> Seo, 8 December 2001.

<sup>34</sup> KCNA, 2 March 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Kang, 12 March 2001.

However, Seoul subsequently said that common action with the North, and with China, was unlikely because they had their own particular agendas vis-à-vis Japan, whereas Seoul's motivations were 'pure'.<sup>36</sup>

There was an element of truth in this, in that while Seoul and Tokyo established diplomatic relations in 1965 (with ROK receiving \$182 million compensation and \$793 million in loans, but no apology)<sup>37</sup> a breakthrough in Pyongyang-Tokyo relations seems unlikely. Under the 1965 treaty Japan recognised Seoul as the 'sole legal' government of Korea.<sup>38</sup> Tokyo's position has shifted since then but Pyongyang continues to demand an apology and compensation: 'The DPRK has maintained a principled stand that it is impossible to establish diplomatic relations with Japan unless there are apology and compensation from it.'<sup>39</sup> The Japanese, for their part, claim that a number of Korean-Japanese have been abducted over the years by North Korean agents and unless they are returned there will be no progress on relations.<sup>40</sup> In this context the textbook issue is a rather minor matter. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) frequently reports, with approval, South Korean protests over textbooks but Pyongyang has paid much more attention to the comfort women issue. *People's Korea*, the pro-Pyongyang paper produced in Japan, had extensive coverage of the Women's International Tribunal held in Tokyo in December 2000, noting that North and South presented a joint indictment.<sup>41</sup>

In the South more attention has been paid to the textbook issue, perhaps because it is less emotive than that of the comfort women and more amenable to Japanese government remedy. The South's position towards Japan is necessarily ambivalent. Japan is vitally important – politically, economically, socially (vide Japanese Koreans) and culturally – and yet there is wide, deep-felt and continuing animosity. There are many issues of contention, some important, others just irritants: for example, disputed islands (Tok-do/Takeshima), the naming of the sea (Eastern Sea /Sea of Japan), the order of names for the joint hosting of the 2002 World Cup, and currently fishing rights in the Kurils.<sup>42</sup> There are many forms of protest. A Korean band at a rock festival at Mt Fuji in Japan tore the imperial Japanese flag in protest against the textbooks, to the cheers of the Japanese audience according to a Korean report.<sup>43</sup> Citizens burn Japanese flags and businesses run anti-Japanese advertisements.<sup>44</sup> Insults about links with the collaborationist past,<sup>45</sup> and opposition calls for the government to stand up to Japan (echoed by the North) are part of the language of Korean politics.<sup>46</sup>

Kim Dae-jung epitomises this ambivalence and the dilemma facing any ROK president. He had much improved relations with Japan before the latest

<sup>36</sup> Shin, 9 April 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Seo, 8 December 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Kim Hong Nack, 1991:164.

<sup>39</sup> KCNA, 21 March 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Seo, 8 September 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Ri, December 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Oh Young-hwan, 15 October 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Yoo, *Korea Herald*, 9 August 2001

<sup>44</sup> Lee, 25 July 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Sohn, 31 July 2001; Oh Young-jin, 17 August 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Hwang, 3 August 2001; Kim Kwang-tae, 15 October 2001.



textbook incident and his visit to Tokyo in 1998, when he ‘declared a bilateral partnership for the 21st century’, was seen to have marked a ‘Korea-Japan rapprochement’.<sup>47</sup> He has responded to the current situation with a mix of diplomatic stick and carrot. He has lodged firm protests, and recalled his ambassador in the standard gesture of disapproval.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand he has called for restraint,<sup>49</sup> and even invited Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi to a summit meeting in Seoul on 15 October 2001 in an attempt to mend the relationship.

Although Koizumi did express ‘heartfelt’ regret, this was not seen as going any further than his predecessors and the visit has been labelled a failure by the Korean press – ‘Kim, Koizumi fail to resolve issues straining Korea-Japan ties’,<sup>50</sup> ‘Koizumi Fails to Win Korean Hearts’,<sup>51</sup> ‘Anti-Koizumi Protests Engulf Korea’.<sup>52</sup> The textbook issue will subside for the moment because of the failure of the *New History Textbook* to gain acceptance from Japanese education authorities, rather than any success of the Koreans, governments or people, to bring about any change of heart in Tokyo.<sup>53</sup> The issues of contention remain unresolved and will continue to bedevil Japan’s relationship with the Korean peninsula.

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<sup>47</sup> Oh Young-jin, 20 July 2001

<sup>48</sup> Hwang, 10 April 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Oh Young-jin, 20 July 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Shin, 16 October 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Son, 15 October 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Soh, 15 October 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Struck and Togo, 15 August 2001.

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